Title: How undergraduate students on a qualifying social work programme make sense of ethics: a phenomenological inquiry

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HOW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ON A QUALIFYING SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMME MAKE SENSE OF ETHICS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship

I, Sally Cornish, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

HOW UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ON A QUALIFYING SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMME MAKE SENSE OF ETHICS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Ethics and values have long been central to social work and to social work education, with principles of rights and social justice underpinning social work practice and accordingly, the social work ethics curriculum. In addition, and in more recent decades, ethics has undergone a period of heightened interest across the social professions. In social work, this is reflected in the burgeoning range of theoretical approaches brought to bear and the growing number and scope of professional ethical codes. However, empirical evidence suggests that despite this emphasis, ethical social work practice may be constrained in current welfare contexts, typically shaped by neoliberalism and austerity. The existing literature finds social workers responding to the challenges these characteristics present in different ways. Some appear to be compliant, or to circumvent stress by recourse to agency protocols rather than ethical reasoning. Others demonstrate resistance, while practitioners' experiences also include stress or isolation. However, there is little research evidence about what ethics means to social work students, and less still based in the UK, meaning that the evidence-base for UK ethics education is limited.

In response to this, this thesis presents a qualitative, pedagogical study that investigated how sixteen undergraduate students in England made sense of ethics. Its methodology, interpretative phenomenological analysis, is based on phenomenological, interpretative principles alongside an attention to the particular, and facilitates close attention to individual meaning and sense-making. First, second and final year students were amongst the participants and the analysis of data gleaned in individual, semi-structured interviews provided a rich picture of their ethical concerns and understandings. The results of the study indicate that for these participants, ethics can be conceptualised in three domains, each with a respective

focus on identity, relationships with service users, and ways of responding to organisational demands. Emphases within and between the three domains vary across and within year group samples, with the third especially significant for participants who had undertaken practice learning in statutory settings. There, patterns of both compliance and resistance are identified, and in this regard the study's results echo those more typical in the literature of those with qualified workers as their participants.

The findings of the study contribute to the knowledge base underpinning qualifying social work education in the UK at a time when course delivery patterns are changing and social work practice and education subject to continuing external critique. They point to ways in which educators might engage meaningfully with students in order to facilitate their development into ethically aware and resilient practitioners, able to maintain value-based practice in challenging and constrained contexts. It is essential that that they do this if students, who will become the qualified practitioners of the future, are to take forward the values and ethical commitment that have long been the hallmark of the social work profession.

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Tables

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Glossary

This includes sets of initials used in the thesis as abbreviations, except those in common usage, with their meanings. These terms are also written in full within the thesis where they appear for the first time.

AASW: Australian Association of Social Workers

BASW: British Association of Social Workers

CCETSW: Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work

DfE: Department for Education

DoH: Department of Health

DipSw: Diploma in Social Work

ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council

GSCC: General Social Care Council

HCPC: Health and Care Professions Council

IASSW: International Association of Schools of Social Work

IFSW: International Federation of Social Workers

IPA: Interpretative phenomenological analysis

NOS: National Occupational Standards

PCF: Professional Capabilities Framework

TCSW: The College of Social Work

QAA: Quality Assurance Agency

NASW: National Association of Social Workers

NISSC: Northern Ireland Social Care Council

SCW: Social Care Wales

SSSC: Scottish Social Services Council

SWE: Social Work England

SWRB: Social Work Reform Board

SWTF: Social Work Task Force

UoB: University of Bedfordshire

Y1: Year One [of the UoB BSc (Hons) Social Work degree course]

Y2: Year Two [of the UoB BSc (Hons) Social Work degree course]

Y3: Year Three [of the UoB BSc (Hons) Social Work degree course

Chapter One: Introduction

> Ethical issues have always been central in social work…Social workers' core values and ethical beliefs are the profession's linchpin
> (Reamer, 1998, p.488)

This thesis reports a qualitative, phenomenological study of how social work students, studying at a university in the south east of England, make sense of ethics in the course of their professionally qualifying education. Drawing on data collected in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with a total of 16 female undergraduates, the study contributes to the pedagogical evidence-base underpinning ethics education in social work. The study's design means that generalisability beyond its three samples is neither sought nor claimed. However, the level of detail and transparency provided of the study's methods and process permit consideration of its wider implications for social work education.

1.1 Rationale for the study

The rationale for my research focus, on ethics in social work education, is situated in personal, professional and educational contexts. I address these here in turn.

1.1.1 Personal context

My initial interest in ethics in social work was borne out of my experiences as practitioner and practice educator. After qualifying as a social worker in 1983 I was employed in various local authority teams for over 15 years, principally in London boroughs and hospitals and with both adults and children as service users. My practice highlighted for me the ethical issues that imbue social work, given social workers' daily experiences of limited resources, competing priorities, different inter-professional perspectives and changing statutory and ideological emphases. As a practice teacher, I became interested in ethics as an aspect of qualifying social work education, and in particular how educators can support students to recognise and engage with ethics as an element of their developing practice. In 2005 I changed direction, moving from social work practice to become a university lecturer on undergraduate and postgraduate qualifying social work degree courses. My academic career since then has illustrated further for me the potential complexity of ethics for social work students, especially given changing regulatory frameworks and the range of approaches reflected in the theoretical literature (see Chapter Two). In parallel with my practice and academic careers, I also explored ethics in social work education while studying first for the Practice Teacher Award and later the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Against this background, undertaking doctoral research provided an opportunity for me both to develop my existing interest further and also to make a contribution to the pedagogical knowledge base of my profession. In recognising this personal starting point I am aware that my existing assumptions about social work ethics have inevitably shaped my approach

to the research. For example, I qualified as a social worker as a young, middle class white woman, supported by a government grant and able to concentrate full-time on my studies. The lecturers and practice educators who taught and supported me emphasised the potential of social work as a means to work towards social justice, and my early experiences as a qualified social worker reinforced this perspective. As both student and practitioner I benefitted from opportunities for involvement in community initiatives as well as casework, and inter-professional working highlighted for me what was distinctive about social work values amongst other professions'. My practice experience was entirely based in teams whose primary focus was on statutory duties, and predominantly in inner city boroughs whose populations were marked by social inequality. All these aspects of my experience, and others, have shaped my personal understandings of social work and its ethical concerns. Throughout the research, I have used strategies to acknowledge and manage this inevitable subjectivity, including reflexivity and the rigour and consistency of my methods (see Chapter Five). However, the lens through which this thesis explores ethics in social work education remains my own.

1.1.2 Professional context

Social work commentators have long argued that the profession is distinctive because of its emphasis on ethics and values (for example, Hollis, 1968; Timms, 1983; Bisman, 2004; Reamer, 2013). More recently, attention to ethics beyond social

work has intensified, amounting to an academic and professional 'ethics boom' since the 1990s (Davis, 1999, p.3). In the health and social care sectors, ethics is now regarded as an essential element of professionalism (Hugman, 2014; Barnard, 2017). In social work, a heightened focus on ethics is evident in the growing number and scale of formal ethical codes, an increasing volume of specialist books and journals, and the widening range of ethical theory reflected in the literature (Banks, 2012, and see Chapter Two). Globally, 126 national social work organisations are committed to common ethical principles of respect and social justice by their membership of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2012; IFSW, 2017). In England, the setting for my study, 'social worker' has been a protected title since 2005 (Parliament, 2016) with professional registration entailing adherence to ethical standards intended to protect the public (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), no date). Together, social work's longstanding commitment to ethics alongside the wider burgeoning of ethics awareness might suggest that ethics' place as a well-established element of social work practice is secure. However, theoretical literature suggests that the neoliberal and managerial contexts for the contemporary profession may present barriers that prevent or restrict social workers from putting traditional social work values of respect and social justice into practice. Furthermore, research evidence, including the small number of studies based in the UK, finds practitioners' lived experience of ethics marked by stress, isolation, lack of support and dissonance between ethical and organisational priorities (see Chapter Three). Membership organisations for UK social workers echo these concerns (Social Work Action Network, 2009; British Association of Social Workers (BASW), 2017b). Meanwhile in England, social work has been subject to continuing criticism in recent

decades, with voices outside the profession tending to highlight the need for knowledge and skills rather than ethics (see Chapter Two). Furthermore, in the last fifteen years regulatory arrangements for social work in England including formal ethical codes have been marked by uncertainty, change and continuing government involvement (see Chapter Two). In this climate, social workers must be adequately equipped if they are to engage knowledgeably and critically with the 'ethics work' that permeates practice (Banks, 2016, p.38). They also need to be able to represent effectively the social work ethical perspective in work with other professional colleagues, given the increasingly inter-professional emphases in practice (for example, *Children Act 2004; Care Act 2014*). This is important for the interests of service users, practitioners' own resilience, and ultimately the identity of the profession (see Chapter Three).

1.1.3 Educational context

The current frameworks underpinning qualifying social work education in England make clear the importance of ethics and values in the academic and practice curricula (The College of Social Work (TCSWb), 2012; Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), 2016, and see Chapter Two). Furthermore, while adult education generally has the potential to be transformative (Mezirow, 2009; Taylor, 2009) professional education is explicitly so, concerned not only with imparting knowledge but also supporting students as they develop their identity within their chosen career. In a

systematic and cross-disciplinary review of higher education literature, Trede, Macklin and Bridges (2012), found that while the process of professional identity development was unclearly defined, there was general concurrence that it included the acquisition of relevant professional values. Similarly, Barretti (2004), having reviewed the empirical literature that explored social work students' socialisation into their profession, argued that while social work educators had a limited understanding of the socialisation process, they commonly acknowledged that values were at its centre. An important element of social work education, therefore, is not simply to teach students about ethics and values in theory, but also to incorporate them in students' growing understanding of what it is to be a professional social worker. This is all the more so if ethics in qualified practice is constrained by the prevalent administrative and political drivers noted above.

However, empirical knowledge about social work ethics in qualified UK social work practice is scant (see Chapter Three). Similarly, little research explores ethics from the UK student perspective (see Chapter Four). There is thus a gulf, between the plethora of theoretical literature, codes and frameworks concerning social work ethics on the one hand, and research-based knowledge about what ethics means for UK students, and students studying in England in particular, on the other. This is a matter of concern for social work educators. Adult learning theorists describe adult students as active participants in their education, with their own experiences and understandings providing the starting point and direction for their studies (for example, Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2012; Merriam and Bierema, 2014; Race, 2014). Accordingly, robust ethics education needs to be informed by an

understanding of what these experiences and understandings are. In response, and following a systematic review of the empirical literature, the research question for my thesis was stated as 'How do students on a qualifying social work programme make sense of ethics, in the context of their professional development?'. Its aim was to investigate the meaning for students of their lived experience of ethics and the significance of this for social work education. Arising from this, the objectives for the study were to investigate:

- students' understanding of the values and ethics that inform their motivations to become a social worker
- how students make sense of the relationship between social work values and ethics and their personal ethical principles
- what values and ethics mean to social work students in the course of their practice learning experiences
- how students experience their emerging professional values and ethics
- the implications of the results for social work education within current professional frameworks

These objectives underpin my thesis, and I return to them in Chapter Ten where I consider how far each has been met. Meanwhile, and before I outline the structure of the work in an overview of its chapters, I provide definitions of key words and phrases.

1.2 Definitions

These are given here to provide clarity for the reader by indicating the meaning of key terminology used in the thesis. An exception is where these words appear in direct quotation from the literature or from study participants, where the author's or speaker's words are unaltered and their own meaning applies.

Social work/social worker

The IFSW (2014), in its global definition, defines **social work** as **'a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people'.** That is the definition used in the thesis, although not all the elements of the definition may apply in all practice settings. A **social worker** is therefore '**an individual engaged in the social work profession'**. With reference to the UK, a **social worker** is also used to mean **'someone registered with the relevant regulatory body'** (see Chapter Two), and so permitted to describe himself or herself as such. Social workers are termed 'qualified social workers' where this clarification is necessary in order to differentiate them clearly from social work students.

Social work student

In the thesis, **social work student** means '**undergraduate or postgraduate student engaged in a course of study that on successful completion qualifies the student to practice as a social worker'.** This is not to deny that there may also be further requirements to be met in order to practice which, in the UK, include registration

with the relevant regulatory body. Equally, social workers may also be students undertaking formal or informal further learning, but post-qualifying education is not the focus of the thesis and so 'student' is not used in relation to this unless explicitly stated.

Values, ethics and morals

In the theoretical and empirical social work literature the terms 'values', 'ethics' (plural and singular) and 'morals' are used variously and sometimes interchangeably. In my own usage I distinguish between them as follows.

Values and social work values

In the literature, where 'values' is used on its own, it generally indicates underpinning understandings about what is deemed desirable, whether held by individuals or characterising a profession. Dolgoff, Harrington and Loewenberg, (2012) note that social scientists generally follow Dewey in regarding values as implying preference. For Dewey (1916) something valued is something prized or esteemed, and implicit in this judgment is that its value is appraised in relation to other things. However, Banks (2012) argues that the word conveys belief rather than simply partiality. Reamer (2013) draws on Rokeach's concept of personal values falling into two categories. For Rokeach (1979, p.48), values may represent either 'ultimate goals or desirable end-states' or the 'modes of behavior' that enable such goals to be achieved. Defining these as 'ultimate' and 'instrumental' values respectively, Reamer (p.29) adds a third category for social work of 'proximate' values, specific to a particular area of practice. 'Values' is therefore a complex and

contested concept. Banks (2012, p.8) offers a simplification, defining **values** as **'particular types of belief that people hold about what is regarded as worthy or valuable'.** This is the sense in which the term is used in this thesis. Accordingly, **social work values** are '**particular types of belief that the social work profession or individual social workers hold about what is regarded as worthy or valuable in the context of social work practice'.**

Ethics and morals

The terminology of ethics derives from the academic discipline of moral philosophy. There, 'ethics' has a range of meanings and usages. Hare (2004, p.121) defines these as falling into three categories: 'morals', 'descriptive ethics' and 'ethics'. The first of these, 'morals', has a normative focus on determining what are right or wrong actions, either generally or in specific circumstances. The second, 'descriptive ethics', is concerned with matters of fact about what people believe is right or wrong. Finally, 'ethics' addresses the meaning of the language and concepts underpinning the first and second usages. In the social work literature, 'ethics' is used in all three of these senses. In the plural, it often implies expectations, in the normative sense implicit in ethics as morals. Instances of this include its use in professional codes. For example, BASW states that its members 'have a responsibility to promote and work to the Code of Ethics' (BASW, 2014, p.4). Similarly, the (US) National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2017) describes its Code of Ethics as being intended to 'guide' its members' practice. In the singular, the meaning of ethics is rather the consideration of what those expectations are, and how they should be applied. For example, Banks (2012) alludes to ethics in this sense as being concerned with moral

problems and judgment; Hugman (2014, p.xiii) describes ethics as a 'discussion' whose aim is the clarification of proper professional conduct. Where 'morals' is used in its own right, it tends to be as a synonym for ethics (for example Jensen and Aamodt, 2002; Stanford, 2011) although it may also, as noted above, carry a specifically normative sense (Banks, 2012; Dolgoff, Harrington and Loewenberg, 2012). Hinman (2013, p.5) distinguishes between the two, defining **ethics** as '**the conscious reflection on our moral beliefs'** and **moral beliefs** as '**beliefs about right or wrong action and acceptable behaviour, especially with regard to how we treat other people'.** I use these definitions in the thesis. Accordingly, **professional ethics** means '**the conscious reflection on moral beliefs in a given professional context'** and **social work ethics** '**the conscious reflection on moral beliefs in the context of social work practice.'** Both are portmanteau terms, however, in that thinking about moral beliefs inevitably includes thinking about what those beliefs are, and often also the values that underpin them.

1.3 Thesis chapter overview

The focus of each chapter of the thesis is as follows.

Chapter One, the present chapter, introduces the thesis. It presents its rationale, clarifies definitions of key terms, and outlines its structure.

Chapter Two provides the background for my empirical study. It includes overviews of social work ethics in the theoretical literature, formal professional codes, and qualifying social work education.

Chapters Three and **Four** review empirical literature since 1990 that investigates qualified and student social workers' understandings of ethics in the context of social work practice and education. In addition, **Chapter Three** opens with an account of the systematic process by which this literature was identified, screened for inclusion and exclusion, and evaluated. **Chapter Four** concludes by explaining how, in the light of the literature review, the present study is intended to offer a contribution to existing knowledge.

Chapter Five first outlines the development of the research question. It goes on to identify the overarching approach to the research, and the rationale for using interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) as its methodology. Having presented the methods employed for the research, the chapter addresses ethical and quality considerations and the role of reflexivity.

Chapters Six, Seven and **Eight** report, in turn, the findings developed from the analyses of data generated from interviews with three participant samples. These comprise students in the first, second and third year of their undergraduate social work degree respectively.

Chapter Nine discusses the results of the study, considering the findings from all three analyses together. First, it discusses them in relation to the existing literature, highlighting where they reflect or amplify current knowledge, and with reference to the qualifying social work curriculum in England. Then, it summarises the contribution the study offers to evidence-based qualifying social work education.

Chapter Ten brings the thesis to a close. Having identified the study's strengths and limitations, it revisits the study's aim and objectives and addresses how these have been met. It ends with recommendations for educational practice and policy, and further research.

Chapter Two: Social work ethics in theory: contexts and debates

This chapter sets the background for the study. It provides in turn overviews of social work ethics in theory, professional codes and qualifying education.

2.1 Theoretical perspectives: philosophy and practice

Professional ethics in the health, education and welfare sectors are commonly underpinned by ideas drawn from Western European philosophy (Hugman, 2014; Barnard, 2017). Reflecting this, social work ethicists broadly agree about the historical prominence of two perspectives: deontology and consequentialism (for example, Clark, 2006; Banks, 2012; Reamer, 2013b). Both are principle-based, rationalist approaches with late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, European roots. Deontologists emphasise the duty to act in accordance with what is intrinsically right, rather than in order to achieve particular outcomes (Reamer, 2013b). The most prominent deontological ethicist was Kant (Hugman, 2014), whose 'categorical imperative', articulated in 1785, expressed the obligation to adhere to universally applicable moral rules (Kant, 1964, cited in Houston, 2012, p.655). Kant also argued that each individual is inherently worthy of respect as a rational being, with his or her own preferences and desires (Banks, 2012). The corollary of this principle of respect is that people must never be regarded instrumentally, but always as self-determining moral agents. Conversely, consequentialists focus on the importance of establishing desirable ends, variously

construed in terms of happiness, ideals or utility (Hugman, 2014). The form of consequentialism that has found most purchase in social work is utilitarianism (Reamer, 2013). The utilitarian perspective, based on the reformist philosophies of Bentham and Mill, holds that right actions are those that produce, on balance, a greater sum of good than bad outcomes (Banks, 2012; Hugman, 2014). For Bentham (1789, p.65) the utility principle means that 'every action whatsoever', whether carried out by individuals or governments, should be judged in terms of the happiness it produced for those concerned. Mill (1861) broadens the concept, arguing that happiness includes not simply personal pleasure but also consequences based on considerations of what is fair and just. Both deontological and utilitarian approaches have been found relevant for social work, deontology because of its emphasis on respect (for example Clark, 2000; Congress, 2010) and consequentialism because of its attention to risk and outcomes for service users (Banks, 2012). The former has proved especially salient, with Banks summarising early statements of social work principles or values as sharing an emphasis on respect for service users as self-determining individuals (for example Biestek, 1961 and Butrym, 1976, cited in Banks). Critics argue that deontology lacks a political perspective (Webb and McBeath, 1989; Clifford and Burke, 2005) and that consequentialism can lead to moral relativism and the oppression of minority groups in society (Clark, 2000; Congress, 2010; Reamer, 2013b). Approaches to ethics derived from concepts of human rights, also with eighteenth century origins, offer other principle-based perspectives that go some way to balance these limitations. Reichert (2011) argues that human rights, derived in the modern era from revolutionary struggles in France and the US, are an essential basis for social work

practice. For Reichart, a focus on rights facilitates the dual attention to both individual circumstances and societal inequalities that distinguish social work from other human service professions. Ife (2012) concurs, and adds that attention to rights serves to balance the essentially individualistic nature of ethical reasoning, and as such serves to counter the dominance of neo-liberal discourse. Furthermore, he argues that being mindful of rights in the process of social work practice maintains a focus on the service user rather than the professional. Nevertheless, and across the health and care professions, principle-based ethics may have limitations in practice, where conflicting principles may apply (Reamer, 2013a; Barnard, 2017). Bioethicists Beauchamp and Childress (1979, cited in Ferber, 2013, p.27) propose a composite model of ethical reasoning for health practitioners, based on what they argue are commonly agreed moral principles of 'justice, autonomy, beneficence and non-maleficence'. Banks (2012) suggests a similar model for social work but grounded instead in principles of dignity, welfare, and social justice. Hugman (2014) notes that such approaches represent ethical pluralism, advocated by its philosopher adherents as offering flexibility and adaptation to circumstances (Kekes, 1993 and Hinman, 2013, cited in Hugman). However, other approaches to social work ethics move away from principles altogether, focusing instead on instead on character and relationships, and I now turn to these.

The ethical significance of character is the hallmark of a virtue approach to ethics. McBeath and Webb (2002, p.1019) note that interest in the relevance of virtue ethics for social work was first voiced in the 1980s, offering a counter to the 'persistent drone of Kantianism and utilitarianism'. This, they argue, echoed its

revival amongst academic philosophers, including MacIntyre. According to MacIntyre (2013), while virtue ethics can be traced to Plato, its principal architect in the ancient world was Aristotle. In the 4th century BCE, Aristotle asserted that the aim of human existence was 'eudemonia', variously translated as 'blessedness, happiness, prosperity' (MacIntyre, p.174). He described the virtues, including courage, good temper and truthfulness, as dispositions facilitating this. Crucially, virtues are not inborn but 'cultivated by habit' (Aristotle, 2009, p.23), and so a virtue approach prioritises the ethical commitment of the individual rather than application of universal precepts. Critics of virtue ethics for social work point out its ready compliance with dominant social structures in failing to ask who should define virtue, or why virtue should be a priority at all (Houston, 2003; Clifford, 2014). Others authors commend its attention to moral agency, and suggest virtues that social workers should cultivate (Clark, 2006; Banks and Gallagher, 2009). Virtue ethics' compatibility with Western and other faith perspectives has also been noted (for example Adams, 2009; Øvrelid, 2008; Bibus, 2013; Schrieber, Groenhout and Brandsen, 2014). Webb (2010) concludes that virtue ethics' focus on reflection and personal disposition is especially fitting for contemporary social work given the dynamic contexts for practice. In unpredictable circumstances, Webb argues, what is needed is not a set of unbending moral rules such as those advocated by deontologists and utilitarians, but the flexible moral agency of the individual social worker doing his or her best. Hence, virtue ethics has also been found compatible with a postmodern perspective that locates morality in the self rather than rules imposed by shifting external demands (Smith, 2011; Kendall and Hugman, 2013).

Other approaches to social work ethics are more concerned with relationships. One is Habermas' discourse ethics, which develops Kant's principle of respect into a theory of inclusive communication (Gray and Lovat, 2008; Houston, 2012). Another is Levinas' ethic of proximity, based on the premise that our instinctive responsibility to another person precedes reason (for example, Tascon, 2010, Rossiter, 2011). However, the ethic of care has gained more purchase in the literature than either of these. It originates in Gilligan's assertion that care offers a moral perspective that values interdependence rather than rationality and autonomy (Gilligan, 1982, cited in Orme, 2002). Gilligan (1982) disputed assumptions that the most highly evolved morality was based on theoretical concepts such as rights and justice. Drawing on her own research, she argued that this was a male-oriented perspective and that women's morality was based on care for others rather than abstract principles. Held (2006) notes that subsequent ethics of care theorists including Sevenhuijsen and Tronto have conceptualised care beyond gender, arguing that we are all carers or cared for during our lives and that care may also be reflected in social practices and values. In social work, the ethic of care has been commended in similar terms as virtue advocates, as challenging or complementing principle-based perspectives (Lloyd, 2006; Gray, 2010; Banks, 2012) and prioritising personal agency (Parton, 2003; Dybicz, 2011). Also like virtue ethics, it has been found congruent with non-Western approaches including Chinese Confucian ethics (Wada, 2014), which emphasises filial piety, the respect due to parents and elders, and ma'at, an Ancient Egyptian concept based on harmony and reciprocity (Graham, 2007). What the ethics of care offers too is a synergy between ethics and relationship-based practice, with the former not applied to the latter but arising inevitably within it. In addition,

Held points out that while rationalist approaches to ethics reject emotion, the care ethicist values it - not unconditionally, but as material for reflection. Thus like virtue ethics, an ethic of care chimes with social work's emphasis on reflection as promoting the ethical use of professional power in the 'swampy lowlands' of the human services sector (Schon, 1991, p.42).

Other theoretical literature focuses not on philosophical ideas but particular topics. It is beyond the scope of the thesis to explore this in detail, but it is relevant to acknowledge as it indicates further the burgeoning interest in social work ethics noted in Chapter One. This body of work falls largely into three categories. The first, while it may include philosophical theory, emphasises the specific ethical considerations that arise in particular professional settings. UK examples include explorations of ethical practice in dementia care (Barnes and Brannelly, 2008), in work with travellers (Cemlyn, 2008), in mental health services (Dixon, 2010) and within the criminal justice system (Lynch, 2014). This literature conveys a sense of ethics as a situated activity, with particular circumstances generating particular challenges for the practitioner. As such, like the emergence of virtue and care approaches, it reflects a broadening conceptualisation of social work ethics beyond universal principles generically applied.

The second category focuses on clarifying ways of thinking about ethics. Banks (2012) differentiates ethical issues, problems and dilemmas. The first of these, she argues, characterises all social work practice. In an ethical problem, a decision may be difficult but the correct way forward is nonetheless evident. Ethical dilemmas are

the most troubling, presenting a number of equally distasteful options. Other authors propose models for structured ethical decision-making (for example Bryan, 2006; Dolgoff, Harrington and Loewenberg, 2012; Reamer, 2013). McAuliffe and Chenoweth (2008), having differentiated models of ethical decision-making as predominantly linear, reflective or cultural in their orientation, advocate an inclusive model. However, they acknowledge its limitations in that it cannot assist where personal and professional ethics collide, or where practitioners are at odds with social policy. Again, this reflects the tension between the consistent application of predetermined precepts and individual moral agency.

The final category of literature, and one especially significant for my own research, addresses the impact on social work practice of current political, policy and administrative contexts. Despite some optimism about the compatibility of these with social work values, and the opportunities they offer for practice that empowers service users (Duffy, 2010; Thyer, 2010), expressions of alarm dominate. In particular, neoliberalism, which emphasises individual responsibility and subjects 'all areas of life … to the logic of the market' (Stark, 2010, p.10), is widely construed as compromising social justice and attention to individuals (for example Webb, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Stark; Weinberg, 2016). In addition, UK authors note the impact of the continuing austerity agenda on welfare spending and practice (for example Lymbery, 2012; Lee, 2014). The dominant sense from this literature is that prevailing circumstances may not be ethically benign, and that aspects of social work's ethical purpose – and accordingly, its identity (see Chapter One) - are insufficiently attended to or under threat. This is a thread that recurs both in Chapters Three and Four,

which review the empirical literature, and in the results of my study itself. Especially important for my research are concerns that statutory placements may socialise students into practices at odds with social work's traditional values. For Preston-Shoot (2012, p.31), this amounts to a 'secret curriculum' by which organisational culture may shift practitioners' and students' focus away from service users in favour of agency demands. A priority for educators, therefore, is the promotion of 'ethical literacy…personal reasoning and responsibility' (Preston-Shoot 2011, p.188). Fenton (2016) adds that younger social workers practitioners and students may accede to neoliberal principles especially uncritically, having been immersed in them throughout their lifetime. This suggests again the importance for social work education, noted in Chapter One, in developing students into practitioners who can recognise and embrace the ethical dimensions of their work, and both the challenges and opportunities that policy and procedure provide.

This outline of theoretical perspectives has suggested a thriving field of interest and scholarship, reflecting the wider 'ethics boom' (see Chapter One) and suggesting ample scope for engagement creative application. However, an overview of theory says nothing in itself about the reach of ideas beyond textbooks and journal articles, or their significance for practitioners and students. Nonetheless practitioners encounter ethics daily, in professional reference points expected to underpin their work. These are formalised professional codes, the focus of the next section of this chapter.

2.2 Values and codes in professional frameworks

Since social work is an explicitly value-based profession (see Chapter One), broad agreement about what those values are is fundamental for both practitioners and students. The IFSW definition of social work, noted above, includes the central position of 'social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities' (IFSW, 2014). These emphases are widely echoed in the literature (for example, Congress, 2010; Thompson, 2015). However, alongside the consensus this suggests, clarity about social work values has repeatedly been found wanting (for example Timms, 1983; Clark, 2000; Banks, 2012). In addition, commentators note the significance for social work, and social work values, of place and time. From a geographical perspective, critics of the feasibility of a global social work identity highlight differences in dominant values from place to place, typically contrasting the individualist Global North with the more community focused Global South (for example, Yip, 2004; Healy, 2007; Hugman, 2010b). Through a historical lens, Reamer (2013b, p.20) notes the profession's changing principal orientations: the 'paternalistic, social justice, religious, clinical, defensive and amoralistic'. He goes on to identify distinct periods within which these perspectives variously dominate, beginning with the nineteenth century preoccupation with the morality of service users to a focus on professionals themselves, in the contemporary climate of accountability and risk. Thus social work values are on the one hand, widely emphasised as fundamental to the profession, but on the other, shaped by differing and shifting contexts.

Table 1: The evolution of social work values and ethics

Period	Concerns and characteristics
Nineteenth century: morality	The organisation of relief for the indigent poor and attempts to strengthen their wayward morality. Challenged by growing demands for social reform
Mid twentieth century: values	The profession clarifies its underpinning principles including commitment to challenge discrimination and oppression
Late 1970s: ethical theory and decision making	Surge of interest in the professional application of ethics, fuelled by challenges posed by new technologies, litigation and rights perspectives
1980s: ethical standards and risk management	Increased amount of formal ethics guidance and concerns with ethical misconduct and the impact of organisational and financial strictures
Twenty first century: digital ethics	Challenges arising online including confidentiality and boundaries

Adapted from Reamer, 2013a and 2013b

Historical accounts of the development of social work in the UK generally highlight the influence of two nineteenth century initiatives, the Charity Organisation Society and the Settlement Movement (for example Doel, 2012; Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). Also found in the US (Horner), both these precursors to social work were based on charitable and Christian principles, with their common concern the alleviation of poverty and its effects, but their emphases differed. Bamford (p.7) notes the 'profoundly moral approach' to poverty advocated by the Charity Organisation Society, whose casework model favoured self-help, the improvement of character, and selective provision of financial assistance to those deemed deserving. Conversely, he characterises the Settlement Movement, which placed university students to live among and support poorer people, as focusing on neighbourhood strengths and the importance of understanding the circumstances in

which poverty arises. In subsequent decades UK welfare has become increasingly secularised and social work professionalised (Banks, 2012). Its ethical concerns have developed accordingly, also reflecting changing circumstances and issues. For example, Reamer's 'digital period' is discernible in BASW's recognition of the ethical challenges as well as practice opportunities that its members may encounter in the use of social media (BASW, 2012). However, concerns with both individual needs and difficulties and the societal circumstances that give rise to them continue to mark the UK profession, and its ethical frameworks. Doel (p.11) argues that while these different responses to poverty need not necessarily be contradictory, in modern social work the casework model dominates, at the expense of interventions with a community focus.

The development of social work values into formal codes reflects this professional evolution. UK commentators note practitioners' historical ambivalence towards unified professional status, whether driven by specialist loyalties or the connotations of professional power potentially at odds with partnership with service users (Rogowski, 2010; Pierson, 2011; Bamford, 2015). Today, different types of document translate values into practice directives. These include both codes of ethics controlled within the profession and also those externally imposed, which may have a statutory and regulatory role and be used to determine an individual's fitness to practise (Webster, 2010; McLaughlin, Leigh and Worsley, 2015). In parallel to these regulatory arrangements, the IFSW and IASSW subscribe to an agreed Statement of Ethical Principles – 'Human Rights and Human Dignity…Social Justice…Professional conduct' (IFSW, 2012) – that they expect member associations to reflect in their own

guidelines. Social work tends to be most highly regulated in the Global North, including the UK and the US, and in countries elsewhere that mirror this model such as Hong Kong and the Philippines (Hugman and Bowles, 2012). Relationships between regulatory requirements and professional associations' codes are diverse. For example, while the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW, 2017) encourages members to apply for one of its 'trade marks' this is not obligatory. In the US, NASW is a membership association but statutory registration authorities refer to the NASW Code of Ethics in their policies (Hugman and Bowles, 2012). In Europe, Hussein (2011) found that while 12 countries defined social work as a regulated profession there was wide variation in requirements. These global differences compromise direct comparison of the codes themselves, as their purpose varies. However, summarising surveys she undertook in 1994, 2000 and 2005 of IFSW member associations' codes, Banks (2012) makes four general observations. First, codes tend to grow over time, with NASW's evolving from one page in its first version in 1960 to 27 by 1996. Second, they typically include professional ideals and values, practitioner characteristics, ethical principles and specific directives and prohibitions. Here, they reflect the theoretical diversity and shift noted above, as although principles dominate, attention to character is also, and increasingly, invoked. Third, newer codes draw heavily on those longer established, especially NASW's. Finally, while codes' stated purposes are generally public protection and practitioner guidance, they also reflect the relationship between ethics and professional status noted in Chapter One. Reviewing responses to codes in the literature, Banks reports that criticism has included that they are both too general and too prescriptive, and privileging professional interest over service–user

perspectives. She also notes that codes may facilitate blame of individual workers for organisational failings. Other authors, echoing the critiques of a global definition of social work above, conclude that codes' tendency to emphasise casework-related principles shows the enduring dominance of Eurocentric perspectives (for example Kreitzer, 2006; Healy, 2007).

In the UK, and especially in England, the immediate context for this study, arrangements binding social workers to an ethical code continue to shift. Following the unification of social services in 1970, BASW was established as the UK's first generic professional social work organisation (Bamford, 2015). The BASW Code of Ethics (2014), underpinned by values of human rights, social justice and professional integrity, sets down expectations of BASW members throughout the UK. BASW (2017a) describes its Code, reflecting the Global Definition of Social Work (IFSW, 2014) and most recently revised in 2012, as 'the definitive document underpinning social work practice'. However, the BASW Code is one to which social workers may or may not choose to opt in, via BASW membership. Conversely, all UK social workers are bound by the ethical codes or standards produced by one of the four national bodies responsible for their professional regulation and registration (HCPC, 2016c; Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), 2015; Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), 2016; Social Care Wales (SCW), 2017). While these vary in presentation and supporting documents, there are three broad commonalities. First, all include respect for and attention to individuals, together with escalation of concerns about the impact on service users of practice failings. Second, they highlight reliability, honesty and accountability, including practitioners' responsibility

for their own continued professional development. Third, all show awareness of the significance for ethics in practice of the organisational context, whether in the provision of a separate code for employers in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, or with reference to employers' responsibilities in the code for practitioners in Wales. However, while the codes share concerns with duty and character, an explicit rights perspective, reflected in the Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh codes, is absent in England. The value of social justice is also missing. That is not to say that rights and social justice are entirely absent from HCPC expectations. Both appear in the Standards of Proficiency, which 'set out what a social worker in England should know, understand and be able to do when they complete their social work training' (HCPC, 2017b). Nonetheless, their not being included as ethical requirements may imply that they are regarded as matters of technical skill rather than the active consideration of what is right or wrong that ethics comprises (Hinman 2013, and see Chapter One). Moreover, while both human rights and social justice are included in BASW's Code of Ethics (BASW, 2014), BASW's UK membership in 2013 was around 15,000 (BASW, 2013), compared with over 93,000 social workers in England alone bound by the ethical requirements of the regulator (HCPC, 2017a). This means that most social workers in England have formal recourse to a single ethical code, in which explicit reference to rights and social justice is absent.

Table 2: Summary of UK regulatory ethical codes for social workers

England: HCPC - Standards of conduct, performance and	• Promote and protect the interests of service users and carers • Communicate appropriately and effectively • Work within the limits of knowledge and skills • Delegate appropriately • Respect confidentiality

ethics	• Manage risk • Report concerns about safety • Be open when things go wrong • Be honest and trustworthy • Keep records of work.
Northern Ireland: NISCC - Standards of conduct and practice for social workers.	• Protect and promote service users' and carers' rights and interests • Create and maintain their trust • Promote their autonomy while protecting from harm • Respect their rights while minimising harm • Uphold public trust and confidence in social services. • Be accountable for the quality of work and maintain and improving knowledge and skills.
Scotland: SSSC - Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers	• Protect and promote service users' and carers' rights and interests • Create and maintain their trust • Promote their independence while protecting from harm • Respect their rights while minimising harm • Uphold public trust and confidence in social services. • Be accountable for the quality of work and maintain and improve knowledge and skills.
Wales: SCW - Code of Professional Practice for Social Care	• Respect service users Establish and maintain trust. • Promote wellbeing and safety of users and carers • Respect individuals' rights while preventing harm • Act with integrity and uphold confidence in the social care profession. • Be accountable and develop knowledge and skills • Embed the Code in others' work if a manager.

Adapted from HCPC (2016b); NISCC (2015); SSSC (2016); SCW (2017)

Professional regulatory arrangements for social workers in England have been subject to continual change over the past two decades, with attendant changes to the codes of ethics by which practitioners are bound. For Blair's New Labour Government, regulation was a means to raise the status and expectations of social care staff and thus key to their intended modernisation of social services (Department of Health (DoH), 1998; Ladyman, 2004). Across the UK, social workers have been subject to compulsory registration since 'social worker' became a

protected title (*Care Standards Act 2000*). In England, the body initially responsible for registering social workers – and students on qualifying social work courses – was the General Social Care Council (GSCC), set up as a dedicated regulator for the social work and social care workforce (GSCC, 2012). The GSCC Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers were developed to 'ensure that workers know what standards of conduct employers, colleagues, service users, carers and the public expect of them' (GSCC, 2010, p.3). They incorporated the rights perspective absent from the current regulatory code, with service users' rights mentioned in three of the six standards (GSCC, 2010). Summarising learning points from its time as regulator, the GSCC (2012) concluded that it would have been beneficial to develop a specific code for social workers, reflecting the values, ethics and duties inherent in the social work role. However, in the aftermath of Peter Connolly's death in 2007 there was further scrutiny of the profession, and attendant drive for change and higher standards of practice. The government commissioned two reports (Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011) and established the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) and then the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB; Department for Education (DfE), 2014). All proposed urgent attention to social work practice (and education, addressed later in this chapter). Subsequently the GSCC was abolished (GSCC, 2012) and its regulatory role passed to the HCPC, which also regulated 15 other professions (HCPC, 2017a). The HCPC's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (see above) are brought together in a generic document, applicable to all the professionals the HCPC regulates, most of whom are allied health workers. Initially, alongside the change of regulator a new body was also set up to provide the dedicated 'strong, independent, national leadership' called for by the task force (SWTF, 2009, p.7). This body, The College of Social Work

(TCSW), had its own ethical code, which included rights and social justice (TCSW, 2012a), but proved short-lived. In 2015 The Guardian reported a 'profession in shock' at the withdrawal of TCSW funding and hence its closure (Hardy, 2015). The following year the government announced far-reaching reforms of children's social work and a social work regulator answerable to the Secretary of State (DfE and Morgan, 2016). Criticism followed (BASW, 2016; House of Commons Education Committee, 2016) and plans were revised, with a new body, Social Work England (SWE), named as the regulator from 2018 (*Children and Social Work Act 2017b*). Questions about SWE's independence from government persist nonetheless (McNicholl, 2016). The significance of this for the present study is that despite the intrinsically ethical character of social work practice (see Chapter One), the profession does not have ownership of the ethical expectations by which its practitioners are and will be bound. In England, social workers have had two regulators since 2001 with a third proposed for 2018, and codified commitments to rights and social justice – longstanding social work principles - are absent from regulatory ethical requirements. This makes it all the more important that qualifying social work educators are effectively equipped to develop ethically literate practitioners able to articulate, apply and maintain the profession's ethical commitment in turbulent times.

2.3 Ethics in qualifying social work education

Social work educators have long recognised ethics as a cornerstone of the qualifying

curriculum (for example, Pumphrey, 1959; Reamer, 2001; Hugman, 2005). Today, many regulatory authorities set down mandatory requirements that qualifying curricula include ethics and values (Papouli, 2016). For example, stipulations that courses of study are underpinned by social work values apply not only in the UK (see Chapter One, and below) but also in the US, Australia and Canada (AASW, 2012; Canadian Association for Social Work Education, 2014; Council on Social Work Education, 2015). In addition, the IASSW, founded in 1929 (IASSW, 2017a) promotes ethical debate in its 467 higher education institution members worldwide (IASSW, 2017b). In 2004 the IASSW, in collaboration with the IFSW, adopted Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training. The Chair of the committee formed to devise the Standards himself acknowledged the potential for them to 'reinforce Western imperialism', but concluded that on completion they reflected fair representation of the organisations' global membership (Sewpaul, 2017). As well as addressing areas including course governance and administration, the Standards note the importance of 'focused and meticulous attention' to ethics education (IFSW AND IASSW, 2004, p.12). They also both highlight values as essential in the curriculum, and note that the demonstration of students' ethics in their practice should be monitored. Hugman (2010, p. 108) summarises criticisms of the Standards as falling into two categories: those directed at specific details and others that are 'against the very idea'. The latter typically reflect wider debates about different international priorities in social work education and echo those regarding social work ethics, similarly pointing out the tendency for Global North perspectives to dominate (for example Payne and Askeland, 2008; Gray, 2016). Nonetheless, the Standards reflect the shared understandings that have emerged in parallel with the concept of a global social work

identity, noted above. In parallel with the expectations the IASSW has of its member institutions, pedagogic theorists internationally address what the objectives of this attention to ethics in social work education should be. Hugman (2005), arguing that perceived purposes of ethics education will reflect how ethics itself is conceptualised, finds broadly contrasting perspectives evident in the literature which echo theoretical approaches to ethics. He characterises these as prioritizing either principles that offer a 'clear framework' for practice or a more personal 'way of thinking and acting' (Hugman, p.538). However, he finds that advocates of both perspectives propose ethics education that develops students' ethical sensitivity, reasoning and responsibility, thus with an inherent emphasis on learning rather than teaching. Echoing the adult learning principles that underpin contemporary UK social work education (see Chapter One) this student-centred focus is evident in the pedagogic practice literature. This presents varied but typically interactive approaches, in common with teaching and learning strategies employed in social work education generally (Papouli, 2016). For example, educators advocate writing as a method by which to clarify and explore values, whether by means of personal narrative accounts (Walmsley and Birkbeck, 2006) or critical incident analysis (Green Lister and Crisp, 2007). Banks and Nøhr (2012), having presented a selection of international case examples that illustrate ethical issues or dilemmas, argue that scenarios or vignettes provide useful raw material for ethical analysis and discussion. Other authors propose the use of debate, or Socratic dialogue (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; Philippart, 2003; Pullen-Sansfaçon, 2010). The latter, derived from Plato's accounts of Socrates' philosophical discussions with his companions, provides a model for the examination of assumptions and the eventual agreement on shared principles, by way of a staged

process of questioning and clarification (Philipart). What these approaches share, as well as their emphasis on students' active engagement, is an understanding that reflection, whether undertaken alone or in dialogue with others, is inherent to ethics. This echoes again Schon's assertion, noted earlier in this chapter, of the synergy between reflection and ethics for professional practice in work with people, as well as similar arguments with specific reference to social work (for example, Bolton, 2010; Gardner, 2014; Ingram *et al.* 2014).

In the UK, the QAA's Subject Benchmark Statements (QAA, 2016, p. 2) outline expectations of what graduates of particular academic disciplines should be able to 'know, do and understand' on successful completion of their studies. The Benchmark for social work states:

> Social Work is an ethical activity that requires practitioners to recognise the dignity of the individual, but also to make and implement difficult decisions (including the restriction of liberty) in human situations that involve the potential for benefit or harm. Programmes in Social Work therefore involve the study, application of, and critical reflection upon, ethical principles and dilemmas as a core requirement
>
> (QAA, 2016, p.13)

Given this emphasis, and the significance of ethics for the socialisation inherent in professional qualification (see Chapter One), the place of ethics in qualifying social work courses may seem secure. However, UK social work education is marked, like that of the profession itself, by change, government involvement, and uncertainty about its future – and the future of ethics within it.

Formal UK social work education has its roots in Charity Organisation Society and Settlement Movement initiatives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with lecture programmes addressing topics such as charity, character and economics (Horner, 2012; Bamford, 2015). However, provision remained fragmentary until the recommendation of the Seebohm Committee in 1968 that social services be unified and generic social work training established (Horner). From 1970 to 2001 the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) approved and quality-assured UK social work training courses as they evolved from undergraduate certificate to diploma (Bamford). Younghusband (1981, p.34) describes the 'training revolution' of the 1960s and 70s, with courses marked by an increased focus on learning objectives including awareness of values. This intensified with CCETSW's introduction of the new qualifying award of the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) in 1989 (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996). The DipSW required students to demonstrate values of dignity, respect, the right to choose, community strengths and the right to protection (CCETSW, 1991). It also affirmed a commitment to challenging racism, described as 'endemic in the values, attitudes and structures of British society, including those of social services and social work education' (CCETSW, p.46). The backlash to this assertion, from inside and outside the profession, was scathing (Marsh and Triseliotis). Momentum for further change in social work education gained pace as high-profile child deaths suggested that social work was preoccupied with 'political correctness' while failing to protect vulnerable people (Bamford, p.78). In 2003, degree level and postgraduate qualifications replaced the DipSW, with the curriculum in England based on National Occupational Standards (NOS)

supplemented by values of respect, honesty, empowerment and anti-discrimination (Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services, 2002).

Social work then came under the critical spotlight after Peter Connolly's death, as noted above. Laming (2009) and Munro (2011) both advised prompt attention to social work education, and the SWTF (2009) recommended reforms to the calibre of entrants and the quality of academic and practice provision. The SWRB shaped the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), which replaced the NOS. Further developed by TCSW and now hosted by BASW (TCSW, 2012b), the PCF continues to determine course design and career structure alongside the regulator's Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2017b). Intended to facilitate holistic assessment, the PCF expresses in nine domains what social work students and practitioners should be able to do and understand at nine stages of their education and career. Stages relevant for qualifying social work education are admission, readiness for direct practice and the end of the first (70 day) and second (100 day) placements. While domain descriptors are similar across levels, the changing expectations of students' capabilities indicate that a developmental process is envisaged. At the point of entry, students are required to demonstrate basic awareness of key aspects of the social work role, as well as motivation to learn. Greater awareness is expected by the stage of readiness for practice, progressing to understanding and supported application by the end of the first placement, culminating in management of complexity and more autonomous practice at the point of qualification. The example below shows the graduated expectations of students in Domain 2, 'Values and Ethics'.

Table 3: Example of a PCF domain, student levels

Level	Entry level
Entry	Recognises the impact their own values and attitudes can have on relationships with others Understands the importance of seeking the perspectives and views of service users and carers Recognises that social workers will need to deal with conflict and use the authority invested in their role.
Readiness for direct practice	Understand the profession's ethical principles and their relevance to practice Demonstrate awareness of own personal values and how these can impact on practice.
End of first placement	Understand and, with support, apply the profession's ethical principles Recognise and, with support, manage the impact of own values on professional practice Identify and, with guidance, manage potentially conflicting values and ethical dilemmas Elicit and respect the needs and views of service users and carers and, with support, promote their participation in decision-making wherever possible Recognise and, with support, promote individuals' rights to autonomy and self-determination Promote and protect the privacy of individuals within and outside their families and networks, recognising the requirements of professional accountability and information sharing.
End of last placement	Understand and apply the profession's ethical principles and legislation, taking account of these in reaching decisions Recognise and, with support, manage the impact of own values on professional practice Manage potentially conflicting or competing values, and, with guidance, recognise, reflect on, and work with ethical dilemmas

	Demonstrate respectful partnership work with service users and carers, eliciting and respecting their needs and views, and promoting their participation in decision-making wherever possible Recognise and promote individual's rights to autonomy and self-determination Promote and protect the privacy of individuals within and outside their families and networks, recognising the requirements of professional accountability and information sharing.

Adapted from TCSW (2012b)

In addition to offering clarity about expected development, the requirement for holistic attention to all the PCF domains means that in England ethics education is effectively infused throughout the qualifying curriculum. Higgins (2016) welcomes the PCF, as usefully unifying academic and practice learning, Taylor and Bogo (2014) caution that it rather blurs capabilities and competences, and criticise the profession's limited critical engagement with its development. Taylor (2015) notes too, having conducted thematic analyses of policy documents and surveys of education practice that despite the PCF, the curriculum in its application remains varied and its content contested. Nonetheless, the PCF's 'Values and Ethics' domain cements the place of ethical learning and assessment in social work education in England, while the separate 'Diversity' and 'Rights and Justice' domains articulate commitments to anti-oppressive practice and social justice. These are especially significant given the absence of reference to rights in the HCPC ethical code, noted above and reflected in the HCPC's ethical guidance for students (HCPC, 2016a). In addition, the PCF is cross-referenced in the standards that inform practice educator training, thus highlighting practice educators' responsibility for modelling and

promoting PCF expectations in their work with students (TCSW, 2013). However, further changes to social work education in England are afoot. Given SWE's responsibility for educational standards as well as professional regulation (*Children and Social Work Act 2017a)* the PCF's future is uncertain. Equally, it is unclear whether students will register with the new body, as they did with the GSCC but do not with the HCPC. Alongside this, education reviews commissioned by the two different government departments now responsible for social work were published in the same year (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014). Neither says very much about ethics or values but prioritises what works in practice, with Narey echoing criticisms of the DipSW that social work teaching places unhelpful emphasis on values and ethical theory. Ethics receives scant attention in statements outlining the knowledge and skills expected of adults' and children's social workers at the end of their first qualified year, and of practice leaders and supervisors working with children (DfE, 2014a; DoH, 2015). It is absent in plans for the assessment and accreditation of children's social workers (DfE, 2017). Continued government commitment to fast-track postgraduate courses and social work apprenticeships, located largely in the workplace (DfE and Morgan, 2016; Skills for Care, 2017), raises questions about how much time will be made available for ethics teaching and learning in these constricted curricula. Meanwhile full-time, university based courses have faced reductions in bursary support and the rises in tuition fees common across the higher education sector (Jones, 2017). The landscape of English social work education and the place of ethics within it remains unsettled, and its future unclear.

2.4 Conclusion: looking towards practice

This outline of ethical perspectives and frameworks in social work has shown them marked by tensions and debates between the general and universal, the personal and the structural, and the professional and governmental. Against this background, the formal expression of social work ethics in professional and educational frameworks in England is characterised by continued uncertainty and external criticism. However, missing from this theoretical overview is knowledge about the meaning of ethics for qualified and student social workers in practice, essential if ethics education is to be evidence-based and engaging. This is the focus of the next two chapters of the thesis, which review the empirical literature.

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Chapter Three: Social work ethics in practice: empirical studies with qualified participants

This chapter is the first of two that review existing empirical material relevant to my study. Having described how papers were sourced, screened and appraised, it continues with a review of research that investigates ethics from the perspective of qualified social workers. The following chapter reviews studies whose participants are social work students. The perspectives of both qualified and student social workers are relevant as the former illuminates the ethical terrain students may encounter on qualification and the latter provides the more immediate background for a pedagogical investigation.

A research question was necessary for the literature review that was broad enough to capture relevant papers but sufficiently specific to maintain a focus on the phenomenon of interest. Accordingly, the question was:

'What is known about employed and student social workers' understandings and experiences of ethics, in the context of their social work practice and education respectively?'

In responding to this, the literature review informs the design of the present study including its interview guides and data analysis (see Chapter Five). I also return to the

empirical literature in the discussion that situates the contribution of the study in current knowledge and educational frameworks (see Chapter Nine).

3.1 The process of the literature review

In the interests of rigour and clarity it was important to employ robust and systematic methods in sourcing and evaluating relevant papers. Literature reviews are sometimes described as systematic when they follow formal guidelines such as those developed by the Cochrane or Campbell Collaborations, and are undertaken by a team of researchers (Aveyard, Payne and Preston, 2016). For a lone researcher, some procedures (for example, team screening) do not apply. However, a review may also be considered systematic if it is driven by a transparent protocol that determines searching, screening and evaluation, and is informed at every stage by relevance to the research topic (Aveyard, Payne and Preston). From this perspective, the literature review was systematic.

3.1.1 Sourcing and evaluating the literature

As a qualified social worker and social work academic I had an existing awareness of the frameworks within which students' developing understanding of ethics is situated, and of terminology and concepts used in the social work ethics literature. Early exploratory reading amplified this, drawing on three types of source. The first

of these was prominent journals: The British Journal of Social Work, The Journal of Social Work, The Journal of Social Work Practice, Social Work Education, Ethics and Social Welfare, The Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, and Social Work. Next were textbooks and chapters by leading authors in the field of social work ethics, for example Reamer (2006) in the US, Banks (2012) in the UK and Hugman (2014) in Australia. The third comprised materials that provide reference points for professional social workers, social work students and educators, including policy documents, reports and codified ethical frameworks. I consulted these materials throughout the study to ensure that its professional context was up-to-date.

Searching for research literature was primarily undertaken online and using DISCOVER, a tool that provides streamlined access to a wide range of index and full-text platforms (EBSCO, 2016). These included those most likely to be relevant to my study: Applied Social Studies Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), the Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PsycINFO and SocINDEX. Early test searches of SocINDEX and ASSIA confirmed DISCOVER's efficacy in capturing the breadth claimed, although sifting duplicate results remained an inevitable task given the range of databases it draws upon. Ethics and values are widely mentioned in social work literature generally, so I restricted the search fields to article abstracts and/or titles. As the terms 'ethics', 'values' and 'morals' are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature (see Chapter One) I widened searching to include the truncated stems of each of these, with an asterisk attached to them to capture related words. I also used relevant terms identified in exploratory reading and drawn from my existing knowledge: 'virtu*', 'respect*', 'social justice', 'right*', 'altruis*',

'motiv*', 'ambition', 'vocation*', 'mission'. 'Social work*' was routinely included as a search term given the breadth of the field of professional ethics. Search limiters were used to ensure that materials retrieved were peer-reviewed, in the interests of quality, and to filter them by date and language. Initially I sought materials produced since 2000, my rationale being to situate the study in the context of UK social work status requiring professional registration and adherence to a formal code of practice (*Care Standards Act 2000*). However, it became apparent that this was too limiting, as before the establishment of the General Social Care Council (GSCC) in 2001 (GSCC, 2012) a growing literature around social work ethics had begun to flourish (Banks, 2012). Hence, I broadened searches to cover the period 1990–2017. I focused on materials in English and from countries where social workers are involved in state welfare provision and in which social work associations are members of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). The first of these requirements was intended to enable me to draw parallels with UK social work, given its role in statutory services. The second was because the IFSW's expectation that member associations base their professional codes on IFSW guidance (IFSW, 2016) suggests broad subscription to the IFSW definition of social work as underpinned by social justice and human rights (IFSW, 2014). I did not include materials addressing ethics in social work research, as this was not the focus of my study. To broaden their scope, I did not limit searches to full-text material available within the University. This meant that some articles identified in searches of DISCOVER were sourced via Google Scholar or the British Library document supply service, or in hard copy. Final searches were conducted in June 2017, although as noted above I continued to scan contents pages of relevant journals for the duration of the research.

I employed two-stage screening followed by quality appraisal. First, I read titles and abstracts to see whether the materials recounted empirical investigations of social work practitioner or student understanding of ethics. I did not include practice literature, given its lack of a systematic methodology (Aveyard, 2010), or theses, as they had not been subjected to the rigour of peer review. Any materials that did not fulfil these requirements were rejected, although I retained some as background (see Chapter Two). 'Understanding' was interpreted broadly to include both awareness and comprehension, whether based on attitudes or experience, and so an inclusive approach was taken to study methodology. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists (CASP, 2017) and Aveyard (2010) informed the second stage of screening and underpinned the development of a generic evaluation tool applied to papers retained. Two initial questions were asked of each paper on a full reading: whether it included a clearly stated research question, relevant to the present study, and an appropriate research strategy. Any paper not meeting these criteria was discarded. Then, I evaluated the quality of each of the remaining papers against six criteria:

1. Attention to research ethics and approval
2. Sampling and recruitment, consistent with stated methodology
3. Data collection, consistent with stated methodology
4. Data analysis, consistent with stated methodology
5. Clarity of results
6. Utility for the present study in illuminating the personal meaning of ethics

Criteria two, three and four reflect there being different quality considerations for different methodological approaches. For example, if a quantitative study claims that its findings are representative of a wider population than its participants alone, both the size and nature of its sample are relevant (Aveyard, 2010). Equally, as qualitative research is generally concerned with meaning and understanding (Braun and Clark, 2013) then data collection methods would be expected to expedite access to this. Each paper was rated one, two or three against each criterion, one being the lowest score and three the highest, giving a lowest possible total of six and a highest of 18. Under the final criterion, given the focus on sense-making of my own research, studies which employed a quantitative methodology alone were disbarred from scoring more than one. Any paper awarded fewer than nine marks in total was rejected, although this applied in only seven cases, suggesting that poorer quality papers had already been identified as such at the screening stages. More than one paper reporting the same study were retained if the papers highlighted different elements of the study's results. I also scrutinised reference lists of retained papers for any further materials that met my initial criteria and were not already included, and evaluated these. Papers kept for inclusion were given a star rating: one star* for 9-12 marks, two** for 13–16, and three*** for 17–18. The rating system I used mean that three stars indicate a qualitative study that is both of good quality and of good or excellent utility for the present research.

Table 4: Sourcing the literature

Stage	Outcome
Initial searches	17,969 references obtained, less exact duplicates
First screening (titles and	293 items retained

abstracts): 17,676 items removed (no empirical data; book reviews; not about participants' understandings of social work ethics; participants not employed social workers or social work students; practice literature; theses; further duplicates)	
Second screening (full text): 159 items removed (no clear research question or appropriate methodology, or for reasons above, previously missed)	134 items initially retained plus two from reference lists 136 items retained
Quality appraisal: 7 items removed as they were awarded fewer than nine marks	129 papers retained, reporting 114 studies: 72 papers reporting 58 studies with qualified social worker participants 57 papers reporting 56 studies with social work student participants

129 papers were finally retained. I sorted these into two sets. 72 reported 58 studies with qualified social workers as participants, and 57 papers reported 56 studies whose participants were social work students. Studies with both student and employed participants were included in the latter group. These two sets of papers form the basis first for the remainder of this chapter, and then for Chapter Four. Within each chapter, I discuss the papers under sub-headings reflecting their focus and with concluding summaries noting key features of the literature as a whole. I include star ratings against the name of each paper when its contribution is discussed in the literature review for the first time to advise the reader of its overall quality, with particular aspects of this noted where relevant. In addition, evidence charts capture details of each study for reference. These include its author or

authors, date, country of origin, context, what it investigates, research design, participants and contribution. The evidence chart for studies with qualified participants is at Appendix A, and for studies with student participants, at Appendix B.

3.2 Ethics in qualified social work practice: the empirical studies.

This chapter now continues with the review of studies with qualified social workers as participants. It begins with three general observations about their provenance, participants and methods

First, while the range of studies countries of origin has widened over the period of the review, the largest single contribution - 33 of the 58 total - is from the US. Just five papers, representing four studies, are from the UK. Three studies have social workers practising in England as participants (Ashford and Timms, 1990; Brannelly, 2006; Ottosdottir and Evans, 2014) and two studies are based in Scotland (Fenton, 2014; Fenton, 2015). In screening papers for inclusion, a criterion had been that study participants were designated as social workers and employed in social work roles, and that if other professionals were included the responses from social workers were clearly distinguished. However, social work qualifications and areas of work vary across time and place (see Chapter Two). Especially significant here, given the number of US studies, is that social workers in the US are employed in private and/or clinical settings to an extent not reflected in the UK. This means that while

some relevance of studies from abroad for my research can be inferred, the implications of their different starting points, in some cases, affects their utility. In addition, as noted in Chapter Two, despite some broad global commonalities, regulatory and other ethical codes differ internationally, with this variation reflected in the countries represented in the literature. The second observation concerns participants' demographic characteristics. While most of the papers note a majority of participants being female, not all record their ethnicity. Where they do, white participants are the largest single ethnic group. The significance of either of these factors for studies' results are rarely commented on; where they are this is noted, where relevant, below. Women are also preponderant amongst social workers in England (Rahman, 2017). Hence, the demographic picture common across the literature is reflected in the immediate background to my own study. The picture with regard to ethnicity is more complex, with the significance of participants' heritage specific to different local histories and contexts. Again, this means that any parallels or inferences drawn from the literature with regard to English social work must be drawn with caution.

Finally, 29 studies use quantitative or primarily quantitative methodologies, and 29 qualitative. Qualitative approaches are more prevalent in more recent studies and in those other than from the US. Most quantitative data were collected in paper or online surveys, which were remotely administered, with sample sizes ranging from 62 to 1,207 participants (Landau and Osmo, 2003; Rice and McAuliffe 2009). Some of the quantitative papers explain that their instruments use terms derived from social work literature or from consultation with practitioners (for example Abbott, 1999;

Egan and Kadushin, 1999) and so could be considered to arise from existing understandings within the profession, rather than being imposed. Nonetheless, predetermined responses are both limiting and open to various interpretations, compounded by the constraints attendant on self-report, such as there being no opportunities for researchers to probe for clarification. This means that the qualitative studies are overall the more relevant to the present study, and so I discuss them in greater detail. The majority of the qualitative studies employ thematic analysis, although grounded theory, discourse, hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches are also represented, and noted where relevant below.

The remainder of this chapter comprises four sections. The first addresses studies whose primary focus is values and principles. The second focuses on studies that investigate ethical decision-making and dilemmas, and the third those exploring social work ethics in particular practice contexts. An overall summary of messages from the studies concludes the chapter, and common threads are noted throughout.

3.2.1 Values and principles

One focus of the studies in this section of the literature review is social workers' espoused values. The earliest English study in the review, questioning the claimed 'special connection between values and social work', investigated values held by 43 family placement social workers in statutory and independent agencies (Ashford and

Timms, 1990*, p.2). Drawing on questionnaire and individual interview data, the paper reports that when the two groups were asked about their values in the abstract, differences were evident. Those based in statutory settings placed greater emphasis on organisational authority. Applying values to case examples provided by the researchers, however, workers in the two types of organisation showed more similarity. Moreover, both emphasised respect and a drive towards reparation and 'making good' for service users (Ashford and Timms, p.11). The quality of this study is compromised by limited information about how conclusions were drawn from the data. Nonetheless, the use of participants' words supports the authors' contention that simplistic rhetoric should be set aside in favour of 'a rich…notion of values' (Ashford and Timms, p.19) – and accordingly, the efficacy of qualitative methods in investigating this.

In the US Abbott (1999)**, like Ashford and Timms (1990), notes the limited evidence-base for claims about social workers' values. Abbott contends that there had been few attempts to measure the values social workers actually held before she devised her own Professional Opinion Scale in 1988. Abbott devised her scale from NASW's Public Social Policy Statements, which were informed in turn by member consultation. As such, Abbott claims that her scale accurately reflects the professional social work perspective. She describes it as comprising four values - basic rights, social responsibility, social justice (further defined as individual freedom) and self-determination – with each value made up of a further ten components. Summarising its use, Abbott reports its efficacy in the US in differentiating values held by social workers from those of other professionals, and

also in showing changes in values between students and experienced practitioners. Having set the scene for her study, Abbott reports her further, cross-cultural use of the Professional Opinion Scale. Hypothesizing that social workers around the world were united by broadly similar values, Abbott gathered data from a total of 128 social workers from 26 countries. While the study confirmed that there was basic agreement on two of the values – basic rights and self-determination – participants agreed less regarding social justice and social responsibility. Abbott concludes that her findings support, to some extent, her initial contention of social work values' cross-cultural commonality. She acknowledges that it is unclear what accounts for the contradictions, where they occur, without acknowledging the limitations inherent in the small size of her sample, give her methodology. However, her comments about diversity in participants' geographical origins and ideological perspectives highlight the methodological challenges of cross-cultural research. For example, she argues that 'liberal' has distinctly different meanings in the UK, US and Australia, and exemplifies this herself in her instrument in which 'commitment to individual freedom' is synonymous with 'social justice' (p.462). In a recent Romanian study, Frunză and Sandu (2017)** uses a constructivist grounded theory approach to investigate 20 experienced social workers' values and their effect on practice. The study is contextualised in the lack of attention that the authors claim social workers in Romania pay to ethical reflection. Frunză and Sandu conclude from their study that their participants' limited grasp of ethics in practice reflects ethics being inadequately addressed in supervision. As a response, they propose a model of 'operational values' including 'autonomy', 'responsibility' equity', 'solidarity' and 'professionalism' (p.55). The study's limitations, with regard to my own research,

include the majority of the data being collected in focus groups, affecting the attention paid to meaning for individuals. However, a message from Frunză and Sandu, Abbott and Ashford and Timms is that values reflect the context in which they arise.

Other, quantitative, studies have explored the relative importance for social workers of the specific value of social justice (Seiz and Schwab, 1992**; O'Brien, 2009*, 2010* and 2011*; Bradley *et al.* 2012**). These studies are highly situated in (non-UK) local circumstances and debates. Bradley *et al.* and Seiz and Schwab note US suggestions that clinical social workers, working as therapists in mental health settings, have different values from those based in the community. Seiz and Schwab focus on clinical practitioners' supposed entrepreneurial characteristics and Bradley *et al.* their alleged psychotherapeutic, pathologising tendencies. Similarly, O'Brien situates his findings in the specific context of Maori/non-Maori demographics in New Zealand/Aeatorea. In all these studies, indications are that while social justice values are 'alive and active' (O'Brien, 2010, p.187) they are more often articulated in relation to individuals or families than at a wider societal level. Personal characteristics and history may also be relevant: the individual and familial emphasis is especially true of women (Bradley *et al.*) and conceptions of social justice reflect personal experiences of marginalisation (O'Brien, 2009). These findings do not directly illuminate the UK picture, and O'Brien's are compromised by very limited information about data analysis. Nonetheless, they raise further questions about the personal and professional interface, suggesting that, in investigating individual ethical experience, this may be a fruitful area of exploration. Two further studies

consider social justice in terms of how and where it is talked about. Olson, Reid and Threadgold-Goldson (2013)*** conducted focus groups with 41 US social workers to investigate their understandings of social justice. They found that participants spoke in terms generally consistent with the literature, for example about 'fairness, equal rights and…resource redistribution', although conceptually rather 'vague and broad' (p.38). Hair (2015)**, in a mixed-methods study with 636 Canadian social worker participants, concludes that talking about social justice with a supervisor assisted social workers in putting its principles into practice in their work with service users. This raises the issue of the importance for ethics of the role of supervision, which echoes Frunză and Sandu (2017) and will be noted further in this and the next chapter.

Other studies investigate values with regard to spirituality. Rice and McAuliffe (2009)**, examining data from two surveys of a total of 1307 social workers in Australia, compared participants' views on activities they believed were ethically acceptable with those in which they had actually participated. The authors found that more participants expressed support for the integration of spirituality and religion into their practice than reported its implementation. They recommend further research to investigate the personal meaning for social workers of ethical thinking in relation to religion. This echoes Ashford and Timms (1990) who found that whereas more independent than statutory workers reported values grounded in religious faith, this was not then reflected in their practice. Together, these studies might suggest an inclination amongst social workers to set aside faith-based values in their practice. Conversely, in another, qualitative Australian study Holden

(2012)** interviewed six social workers who identified themselves as valuing a spiritual lens through which to view their work. The aim of the study was to investigate how participants incorporated this perspective into ethical professional practice. Thematically analysing transcripts of semi-structured interviews, Holden found that participants understood spirituality in a range of ways, including specific faiths as well as a search for personal meaning. She also describes a dynamic interplay between participants' own faith and service users', for example with the former providing a perspective on practice while the latter may be challenged by life events. Holden concludes that social workers and social work students need time and opportunities to explore the spiritual aspect of their work, especially if they are to be supported not to impose their own values on others. Like Hair (2015), Holden suggests the relevance of reflective space for ethical practice. Researchers also explore values and spirituality in a US context. Valutis, Rubin and Bell (2014)*, investigating 197 social workers' values within a broader survey about attitudes to family planning, note that discrepancies between religious and professional values correlated positively with high religiosity, being male and holding conservative political views. As with the studies investigating social justice, this suggests the significance of personal characteristics. Reporting on another US survey, with 169 qualified social worker participants and focusing on value conflicts, Valutis and Rubin (2016)* note the complexity of values and the attendant limitations of simple definitions, citing and echoing the point made by Abbott (1999) about the same terminology meaning different things to different people. In particular, they caution against over-emphasising the significance of religion, suggesting that personal values are a broad concept that needs further clarification.

Finally, two studies explore another dimension of the relationship between personal and professional domains: the types of attention paid to the self and to others. Weinberg (2013)** interviewed 26 Canadian social workers in a study using a qualitative discourse approach which, she argues, challenges assumptions of unified consciousness and so is ideal for investigating 'the negotiation of the identity of the ethical practitioner' (p.86). Identifying competing discourses of care for the self and for others, Weinberg (p.96) portrays the relationship between them as inherently changeable: 'like an Escher painting … What is foreground and what is background will always keep shifting'. Poorvu (2015)** used mixed qualitative methods to investigate 16 US social workers' experiences of practising while seriously ill. Although the study's principal concern was the impact of illness on the use of self, its aims include consideration of attendant ethical dilemmas. Poorvu claims as her most significant finding that major illness brought with it incidents of impaired judgment, indicating practice which failed to meet professional ethical expectations. For Poorvu, the solution is a greater amount of ethical education, both before and after qualification. Both these studies raise again questions about the personal/professional value dynamic and the ethical challenges it may present – and suggest the utility of qualitative methods for teasing out details of individual ethical experience, absent from survey-based research.

3.2.2 Ethical decision-making and dilemmas

Other studies investigate ethical decision-making. Again, most are quantitative, and so while they highlight different personal attitudes and responses to making decisions, the methods they use provide a broad brush, rather than individualised, picture. Doyle, Miller and Mirza (2009)** surveyed 493 US participants to investigate factors relevant in their ethical decision-making practice. They found both demographic factors and professional values appeared to be significant in the decisions participants made, and that the wider the disparity between the two, the greater the difference between what participants 'would and should' do in a given situation (p.6). However, they caution against a simplistic assumption that the personal/professional ethical congruence reported is accurate, and note that participants may under-report ethical dilemmas if they are experienced as uncomfortable. Linzer, Conboy and Ain (2003)**, noting the limited empirical work in the field, investigated 121 Israeli social workers' identification of ethical dilemmas. Participants most often cited confidentiality as problematic and also noted the impact of large caseloads. The authors express concern that many participants spoke of seeking support with their dilemmas outside the profession, raising questions about the quality or availability of supervision. In two papers recounting another Israeli study, Landau and Osmo (2003)** and Osmo and Landau (2006)** argue that a normative approach to ethical decision-making lacks an empirical basis. In their questionnaire-based study they asked 62 participants first to rank a range of ethical principles in order of importance and then to respond to case vignettes. Quantitative

content analysis determined that, while most participants favoured a deontological ethical approach in principle, when they considered case examples, utilitarian responses dominated (Landau and Osmo; Osmo and Landau). The authors found virtue, care or rights approaches little evident in participants' thinking. They conclude by noting calls in the theoretical literature for ethical pluralism, and advocating the recognition that there is no definitively correct approach to ethics but that different perspectives offer different insights (see Chapter Two). They conclude that educators might facilitate clearer articulation of decision-making by drawing more widely on ethical theory. They contend too that transparency in social workers' ethical thinking is important for service users, as default recourse to utilitarianism 'can justify trampling on the rights of a vulnerable minority' (Osmo and Landau, p.874). Another quantitative study echoes Osmo and Landau in concluding that a flexible perspective on ethical decision-making is warranted. Kaplan (2006)** researched 265 US social workers' moral reasoning capacity in relation to the academic discipline of their first [undergraduate] degree by asking participants to rank the ethical significance of factors in a vignette. Kaplan interpreted the results using the concept of post-conventional moral reasoning - the capacity to respond to competing moral demands by the application of critical analysis (Rest *et al.* 1999, cited in Kaplan). Finding this most marked in students whose first degrees had been in the liberal arts, Kaplan argues that social work education should incorporate a liberal arts perspective. This, she suggests, would reinforce social work's identity as 'a profession rather than a technical vocation' (p.520) and equip practitioners to respond effectively to the intricacies of service users' circumstances.

For insight into individual experience of ethical decision-making it is necessary to look to qualitative studies. Congress (1992)*, Dolgoff and Skolnick (1996)**, Holland and Kilpatrick (1991)*** and Kugelman (1992)** offer early contributions that are among the relatively few qualitative US studies included in the review. The first two of these papers provide limited detail, which limits their usefulness here, but both highlight issues that will be revisited later in the literature review. Congress, seeking written and some interview responses to vignettes from 59 placement supervisors, highlights the possible significance for students of ethical role models. Dolgoff and Skolnick, similarly administering vignettes to 147 participants in an investigation of ethical decision-making in work with groups, note that no participant cited the professional code, and point out the different ethical issues raised in specific practice settings. Holland and Kilpatrick, and Kugelman, are more important for the present study. Holland and Kilpatrick, using a clearly articulated grounded theory methodology, collected data in semi-structured interviews with 27 social workers, asking open questions and exploring participant-defined critical incidents. They go on to present a model of decision-making comprising three value dimensions - authority, philosophical focus and interpersonal orientation – and describe how participants' accounts show them variously positioning themselves, and the challenges they encounter. Fitting to a grounded theory study, the emphasis here is on the emerging theory rather than the apprehension of a phenomenon. Nonetheless, the authors' conclusion that 'most participants expressed a poignant sense of loneliness or isolation in their struggle with moral questions' (p.140) is telling, suggesting the powerful responses that ethical engagement may evoke. Moreover, the suggestion that discussion might ameliorate this lonely experience,

alongside the acknowledgement that, for at least one participant, supervision was marked by discomfort, raises (with Linzer, Conboy and Ain, 2003 above) questions about the organisational contexts for practice. Kugelman investigated the part ethics played in 20 social workers' decision-making behaviour by asking them to respond to case scenarios, also using semi-structured interviews. Using 'inductive logic' (p.63) Kugelman then identified the ethical and non-ethical factors that informed participants' conclusions. In the study, 'ethical' issues included regard for service user autonomy, anti- discriminatory practice and professional integrity; 'non-ethical' issues included employers' expectations and inter-professional power dynamics. While this paper provides a less clear account of its analytical method than Holland and Kilpatrick, it nonetheless similarly offers insight into lived experience, absent from the quantitative studies. Furthermore, it raises the question of the significance of practitioners' ethical orientation for service users, with participants differentiated as 'deterred' or 'undeterred' advocates (p.68; p.70). In conclusion, having concurred with Holland and Kilpatrick about the importance of a clear ethical foundation for social workers' decision-making, Kugelman (p.76) describes the 'apathetic drift' evidenced by participants who lacked such a basis for their practice. She also regards the dominance of rules for some social workers, as opposed to the reflective application of ethical principles, as symptomatic of the 'gradual technologizing' of social work practice (p.75). The implications of these studies for social workers in the UK today is compromised by their US context. In particular, Holland and Kilpatrick describe their participants as postgraduate qualified, suggesting that they may be involved in clinical practice and engaged in psychotherapy, unlike the majority of UK practitioners. However, their significance for the present research lies rather in the

insights they offer into the intensely personal nature of ethical decision-making in practice. This includes both the possibly negative effects of organisational issues but also the potential scope for personal agency. This means that different choices are open to social workers in how they frame and respond to situations requiring them to make decisions in their work consistent with social work values.

Although Holland and Kilpatrick illustrate the usefulness of qualitative research in exploring ethics, they recommend further work in terms of larger samples and assessment of variables, suggesting a quantitative orientation that dominated the field over subsequent years. Over a decade later, McAuliffe (2005)** argues that Holland and Kilpatrick's research came closest to social workers' subjective ethical experience. Having interviewed 30 social workers in Australia to explore the impact on practitioners of ethical dilemmas, and while finding positive learning and a sense of mastery for some, McAuliffe reports that most effects could be construed as negative. A lack of information about data analysis limits the quality of this paper, but nonetheless participant quotation supports the author's claims of physical ill-health, emotional stress, relationship difficulties and compromised responses to service users. In a later article drawing on the same study, McAuliffe and Sudbery (2005)** note that participants also voiced experiences of the problematic nature of their in-house supervision, with fewer than half choosing to share their dilemmas there. Fine and Teram (2009)** offer a Canadian perspective, having interviewed and held focus groups with a total of 71 participants in a grounded theory study. They conclude that rather than taking a pluralist approach to ethics, participants tended to orient themselves either as sceptics, demonstrating a virtue approach, or

believers in regulatory principles, in particular, the professional code. Here, echoing Kugelman (1992), there is a sense that practitioners' ethical persona is an individual and consistent characteristic of their practice, rather than one that fluctuates according to circumstances. Overall, the literature conveys ethical decision-making as complex, idiosyncratic and sometimes troubling, highlighting again the importance of effective ethics education if newly qualified practitioners are to be able to engage with it effectively.

3.2.3 Social work ethics in particular practice contexts

Other studies have explored ethics with an emphasis on issues specific to particular areas of practice. The largest single group of these draws research participants from health care settings. Csikai and Sales (1998)**, noting the increasing complexity of ethical dilemmas in hospitals presented by modern technological advances, used questionnaires to investigate social workers' contributions to hospital ethics committees in Pennsylvania. They did this by asking 159 social workers and committee members, mostly women, and 148 committee Chairs, all medical doctors and mostly men, to rate their expected and actual role in committee activity. No significant areas of conflict were identified, although while the social workers tended to emphasise what they offered in terms of patient self-determination, the Chairs regarded the social work role more as being representative of community values. Despite this broad agreement, in practice social work input on the committees

appeared to mirror the vision of the Chair more closely than their own. Similarly, Csikai (2004)** surveyed 110 hospice social workers regarding their involvement in ethical decision-making discussions, and concluded that despite the value of their non-judgmental perspective, they had limited involvement in inter-professional policy and education. These studies are part of a larger body of work, not all included here, whose primary focus is ethics committees in the US. However, they raise questions of possible relevance for the UK about how social workers perceive themselves and are perceived by others in inter-professional contexts.

Boland (2006)**, similarly noting the new ethical challenges presented for US social workers by emerging medical technologies and funding arrangements, report a survey of 239 participants employed in hospitals. They found that while participants tended readily to acknowledge the ethical components of situations involving end of life choices, matters of funding tended to be regarded as purely administrative. Other studies counter these findings, with more nuanced results regarding participants' ethical awareness. Five quantitative or principally quantitative US studies found social workers in health settings caught between drivers of organisational culture and service user need. Riffe (1998)** investigated US experience in the context of managed care regimes, which she defines as the systematic cost minimisation initiatives increasingly prevalent in the US since the 1970s. She found that just 24 per cent of her 442 participants found that managed care rarely or never led to ethical conflict between service users' best interests and funding constraints. Proctor, Morrow-Howell and Lott (1993)* used structured interviews and coding based on the NASW Code of Ethics to explore the ethical

dilemmas 15 social workers experienced in a total of 395 cases of hospital discharge planning. The authors report that 14 per cent of patient cases generated ethical dilemmas. Most frequently, these concerned tensions between either service user autonomy and their perceived best interests, or social workers' competing loyalties to service users and inter-professional colleagues. Likewise, Egan and Kadushin (1998)** and Kadushin and Egan (2001)** identify home health care as an under-researched area of social work practice in surveys of 118 and 364 participants. Ethical issues reported arise from limited resources, clinical challenges and multiple stakeholders. Three US studies surveyed mental health social workers. Taylor (2006) found her 320 experienced practitioner participants tended to agree that service user self-determination was an important ethical consideration, albeit tempered by other considerations including control. This study also highlighted the role of experience, as where participants reported change in their views over time they tended to point to having become more able to manage ethical complexity and the need for compromise between ideals and reality. Walsh *et al.* (2003**, p.94) asked participants to rate the frequency of a range of ethical dilemmas in their practice, and how 'bothersome' they found them. While principally quantitative, the study also included 'conceptual coding' of participants' own lists of ethical dilemmas they had encountered which were not included in the questionnaire (Walsh *et al.* p.95). The authors conclude that not only are social workers 'routinely' aware of ethical dilemmas, including regarding resources, service user autonomy and the dominant medical model, but that they are 'indeed bothered' by them (Walsh *et al.* p.96). Noteworthy here, as this study is one of those included with the relatively largest proportion of men as participants - 30.3 per cent of the 994 total participants -

Walsh *et al.* also report differences between men's and women's responses. Despite broad similarity between the two in how frequently ethical dilemmas were noted, women were more often bothered by them, which Walsh *et al.* suggest might reflect women placing higher value on relationships with service users. Walsh *et al.* also note Gilligan's findings about women's moral orientation towards care, rather than justice (Gilligan, 1982, cited in Walsh *et al.*). Carpenter and Platt (1997)**, however, surveying 127 clinical social workers in mental health settings, found that men and women answered similarly. Overall, their participants generally reported a changed emphasis since graduation from altruism and idealism towards respect and pragmatism, echoing Taylor above. Again, the authors note the ethical challenges inherent in working in particular practice contexts, here the US managed care regime with its emphasis on financial restraint. For example, one participant noted 'I feel pessimism about social change especially as it relates to continued cutbacks in human services and an increasing number of people are homeless, hungry, and receive no health care' (p.343). While managed care is a specific feature of the US practice landscape, inferences may nonetheless be drawn about the relevance of these findings for the UK given prevalent financial constraints on welfare (see Chapter Two).

Ethics amongst social workers employed in health settings has also been investigated in wholly qualitative studies. Walsh-Bowers, Rossiter and Prilleltensky (1996)* interviewed 14 social workers based in Canadian hospitals. They found an emphasis on what participants perceived as unhelpful medical hierarchies and 'dubious organisational practices' (p.324), and a tendency to distrust supervision within the

employment setting and prefer to confide instead in peers. Landau (2000a**; 2000b**), having noted the utility of Holland and Kilpatrick's (1991) methodological approach, recounts a study in which 32 social workers in Israeli hospitals were interviewed about the social work contribution in the clinical setting. Landau (2000a) notes that social workers in management roles tended to be more virtue-oriented, emphasising the need for reflection, and also to recognise the broader context for interventions. Conversely, those engaged in direct practice were more inclined to highlight service user rights, or favour a utilitarian approach. Landau (2000b) goes on to report that social workers themselves have a reasonably clear grasp of their ethical expertise, and the importance of inter-professional relationships in translating this into action. Participants themselves did not offer theoretical constructions of their practice, although Landau (2000b) concludes that greater familiarity with ethical principles and theories might facilitate more consistent decision-making. In the US, Csikai, Roth and Moore, (2004)** and Dennis, Washington, and Koenig (2014)** interviewed 12 and 14 social workers respectively about ethical issues they faced in their work with people at the end of life. Together, they suggest the need for greater, more structured support for social workers dealing with the conflicting demands from service users, carers and organisations. Again, the practice environment for these studies does not directly reflect that of the UK, and the quality of Walsh-Bowers, Rossiter and Prilleltensky's study is compromised by its very limited account of data analysis. Nonetheless they again raise questions about the UK experience given the current emphasis in welfare provision of austerity, and the necessity of inter-professional working. Furthermore, they also underline the importance of adequate support for social workers dealing

with ethical issues in their practice. Proctor, Morrow-Howell and Lott (1993*, p.175) assert that social workers' recognition of ethical dilemmas is 'good news …as indicating the seriousness' of their ethical commitment. If this is so, however, without safe contexts within which support can be accessed the isolation described by Holland and Kilpatrick may be an unavoidable concomitant of – or disincentive against – consistent ethical engagement.

Elsewhere, studies investigate ethics in other than the health sector. Two focus on work with older people. In a questionnaire-based study Sung and Dunkle (2009)* asked 50 US social workers how they showed respect to older service users. They found that there were seven principal ways in which this happened, with linguistic respect noted as both most frequent and most important. The study also raises questions about the cultural aspect of respect, with some participants acknowledging the role of culture in service users' expectations and how limited resources or inflexible requirements might make these difficult to meet. Two studies use the ethic of care as a framework within which to make sense of participants' work with older people with dementia and forced migrants with disabilities. Brannelly (2006)*** investigated seven social workers' and eight nurses' responses to people with dementia, with data drawn from interviews and observations of practice in England. She went on to use Tronto's ethic of care, comprising 'attentiveness', 'responsibility', 'competence' and 'responsiveness' (Tronto, 1993, pp.127 – 136, cited in Brannelly, pp.200 - 201) to inform analysis. Discussing her results with reference to the (then) UK National Service Framework for Older People, with its emphasis on respect and dignity (DoH 2001, cited in Brannelly) Brannelly

found that social workers in particular faced challenges in implementing a care-based approach. She suggests that this was because their interventions into people's lives tended to be in response to crisis and without having had relationship-building opportunities. Her most significant result, she argues, is that workers attentive to service users were consistently so, and likewise those inattentive; these orientations appeared a consistent function of the practitioners' professional persona rather than context-dependent. Brannelly p.203) contends that this is a 'profound finding' as it shows 'the powerful consequences of individual practitioners' values' in action. This echoes Kugelman (1992, p.68) who described those of her participants with a clearly ethical basis for making decisions as 'undeterred' in their advocacy for service users. Conversely, Ottosdottir and Evans (2014)**, having carried out semi-structured interviews with 17 participants working in various roles with migrants in England, report the negative impact on them of organisational constraints. This is illustrated by the words of a social worker participant whose experience was that 'bickering amongst ourselves' about procedural issues (p.165) took attention away from the needs of the service user. Much of this study's focus is on service users', carers' and other professionals' experiences rather than social workers', and not all is directly relevant here. However, being amongst the few studies exploring social work ethics in the UK, it conveys the complexity of contemporary UK practice, with social workers' capacity to respond to service users shaped by national and local policy. Moreover, the study also found other professionals and service users regarding social workers in statutory teams as uncaring and bureaucratic. This raises, with Brannelly, questions about challenges the social work role may present to demonstrating care, and also about implications for relationships with service users

and inter-professional colleagues.

Pullen-Sansfaçon (2011)** further illuminates the significance of sector in investigating ethical practice with First Nation Canadian service users. As part of a grounded theory study in which interviews were just one of the forms of data collection, Pullen-Sansfaçon interviewed two self-directed group workers (SDGs), whose role had an explicit focus on social justice, and four other qualified social workers. Pullen-Sansfaçon identifies that both personal and professional drivers may inform practitioners' decisions. Despite this, the SDG practitioners seemed the more able to resist practice guidelines where they conflicted with ethical practice. For others 'Words such as hopelessness and powerlessness effectively translate some of the feelings expressed by participants when referring to the effect of employment context on their decision making' (p.368). Pullen-Sansfaçon concludes that a strong professional value base may enable workers to resist unwelcome norms. Furthermore, she suggests, like Osmo and Landau (2006), the value of a virtue approach. However, this is less in order to determine what is 'ethically right' (Osmo and Landau, p.873) and more as a counter against organisational demands that are not supportive of ethical practice. Elsewhere, organisational requirements of practitioners are not invariably represented in the literature as ethically questionable. McLaren (2007, p.22)***, argues that social workers who resist official requirements may be 'supporting their own personal feelings and viewpoints more actively than the rights of others'. Using a phenomenological approach, McLaren investigates six Australian social workers' practice of forewarning – telling parents at the commencement of intervention that professional safeguarding obligations limit

confidentiality. She reports that despite participants' awareness of employers' expectations they tended not to forewarn, especially at the first point of contact. McLaren argues that this may reflect an individualised conception of professionalism not only at odds with social work's, but which may disregard service users' rights to informed engagement.

Qualitative studies of situated social work ethics are also contextualised in specific areas of practice. One (Linzer, Sweifach and Heft LaPorte, 2008**; Sweifach, Heft LaPorte and Linzer, 2010** and Sweifach, Linzer and Heft LaPorte, 2015**) used focus groups with participants from the US, Canada, Israel and Cuba to investigate ethical practice in the aftermath of disasters. Simmons and Rycraft (2010)* explored conflicts experienced between military and social work ethical expectations by 25 US social workers working in combat zones. Kjørstad (2005)** interviewed 12 social workers involved in the implementation of the Norwegian 'workfare' policy, and Keinemans and Kanne (2013)** elucidated the moral issues relevant for 19 social workers working with teenage mothers in the Netherlands. Two overarching conclusions may be drawn from these papers. The first is that specific circumstances generate specific ethical questions, for example, whether to break inter-professional protocols to inform a parent that their child has been killed (Sweifach, Heft LaPorte and Linzer) or how to secure resources for service users of lower apparent priority than those affected by public disasters (Linzer, Sweifach and Heft LaPorte). For these, there may not be readily available and easily applicable solutions, supporting the contention made by Kugelman (1992) that guiding principles are of greater use to social workers than specific rules. The second is that personal and professional

values are not necessarily congruent with one another or with stated agency expectations. Furthermore (again echoing Kugelman), in a given set of circumstances different practitioners will find their own ways of dealing with this tension.

The impact on ethical practice of administrative contexts, a thread running through many of the studies already discussed, is the specific focus of a further body of work. Quantitative studies suggest troubling and complex experiences, but again their methodologies mean the depth and detail in which these are explored and portrayed are limited. DiFranks (2008)** investigated the 'ethical disjuncture' 206 participants experienced when unable to apply the NASW ethical code in practice. She defined 'ethical disjuncture' as 'dilemma-induced distress…when belief and behavior are discrepant or when belief and behavior scores are highly discordant' (p.169), and combined Abbott's values descriptors (Abbott, 2003, cited in DiFranks) with a Likert scale in a survey instrument. Reporting participants' disquiet when unable to put their professional values into practice, DiFranks argues that support is important. Consequently, she recommends that the usual practice of social workers being offered less supervision as they gain in experience should be reviewed. She also notes that participants whose social work education included specific ethics input reported less disjuncture, and suggests that having become aware of their own discomfort, they developed a more nuanced perspective to address it. Here, DiFranks draws on the concept of '*cognitive dissonance* (awareness of discordance between belief and behavior) ' (Festinger, 1957, cited in DiFranks, p.175, italics in original). Ulrich *et al.* (2007)* and O'Donnell *et al.* (2008)** similarly address practitioners' support needs, using surveys of 1215 and 478 participants respectively

to investigate the 'ethical climate' of organisations. These studies draw on the concept, originating in nursing literature, of 'moral distress', which O'Donnell *et al.* (pp.4–5) explain as a:

> …painful feeling and/or psychological disequilibrium when nurses are conscious or the morally appropriate action a situation requires but cannot carry out that action because of institutional obstacles.

Both studies note the role of employer supportiveness in mitigating this experience, and in encouraging practitioners to be less inclined to leave their profession. O'Donnell *et al.* also report that social workers who felt supported in their organisations were more likely to be morally active, for example seeking ethical training and initiating inter-professional ethical discussion, than those who did not. Two further papers drawn from the same study add further insights. Danis *et al.* (2007)** note that witnessing retaliation against staff who voiced ethical concerns did not appear to lead to any less inclination to speak out suggesting, with Kugelman (1992) and Brannelly (2006), the significance of personal disposition. Grady *et al.* (2008)** argue that ethics training both has a protective effect and is positively correlated with practitioners taking moral action. Finally, Gallina (2010)** and Mäntärri–van der Kuip (2014; 2016)** find links between stress and practice settings' characteristics, using survey data drawn from 378 and 817 social workers in the US and Finland respectively. Gallina, noting the impact of economic factors, explicitly contrasts NASW's ethical expectations to the prevalent dominance of market forces in the US welfare arena. Mäntärri–van der Kuip argues that

managerialist contexts for practice affect both workers and especially service users, who face 'the brunt of …economic austerity because exhausted social workers are unable to do their jobs properly' (2014, p.685). The emphases differ here. Mäntärri–van der Kuip, noting Finnish social workers demonstrating in protest, takes a collective perspective. Gallina's focus is more individualistic, for example highlighting the dilemmas a social worker may face when working with a service user whose insurance will shortly expire. Gallina also speculates that stress may be under-reported in an attempt to minimise the discomfort of 'cognitive dissonance' (no page number), a concept also drawn upon by DiFranks, above. Again, these studies reflect specific local circumstances, but share the theme of conflict between what their ethical commitments might ask of a social worker, and what the practice environment makes feasible.

Two studies, offering qualitative insights into the impact of administrative contexts, echo McLaren (2007) in not portraying their participants - social workers in Greece and Scotland – as invariably prioritising ethical over other considerations. Papadaki and Papadaki (2008)***, employing a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, drew upon 27 Cretan social workers' written reflective accounts of ethically difficult practice situations. As well as challenges presented by inter-professional relationships, participants also wrote about organisational failure to meet service user need. Papadaki and Papadaki argue that participants' tendency to find individualistic solutions – giving service users their own money, or making personal decisions about priorities – rather than raise concerns formally constitutes a dereliction of ethical duty. This study raises important and useful questions about

social workers' responses to contexts that inhibit ethical practice. With others (Kjørstad, 2005; Fine and Teram, 2013; Mänttäri-van der Kuip, 2014) the authors note that social workers may operate as 'street level bureaucrats'. In this role, caught between their own values and organisational constraints that make 'care and responsibility conditional' (Lipsky, 1980, p.71, cited in Papadaki and Papadaki, p.164), they may have to make troubling decisions about to how to manage the tension between opposing accountabilities. Like Holland and Kilpatrick (1991) Papadaki and Papadaki point to social work ethics being potentially a lonely experience. However, references to the 'newness' of the social work profession in Greece highlights the differences between the contexts within which the participants there, and social workers in England, practice. Closer to home, Fenton (2014, 2015)*** concludes that Scottish criminal justice social workers may not much longer find social work their natural habitat given her participants' apparent uncritical acceptance of the sector's shift from welfare to public protection priorities. Drawing on Taylor (2007, cited in Fenton, 2015, p.1417) Fenton defines ethical stress as incorporating both ethical disjuncture and 'ontological guilt… the guilt experienced when people cannot act in accordance with their values'. Having analysed 100 participants' questionnaire responses both statistically and inductively, Fenton (2015) found that while workloads and preoccupation with risk contributed to ethical stress, constraints on the type of work permissible with service users were less significant. Fenton notes, however, that managers' support is an ameliorating factor, and suggests with DiFranks (2008) and Hair (2015) that supervision has an important role in facilitating the exploration of ethical issues. Furthermore, Fenton (2014) found younger, less experienced practitioners less concerned by agencies'

neoliberal values than their older colleagues. She argues that social workers who were adolescent in the UK during the Thatcher era might be inclined to prioritise individual responsibility over structural disadvantage, having grown up in a period where this was the dominant perspective in welfare provision. Together with studies above that explored social justice (for example O'Brien, 2009; Bradley *et al.* 2012), this suggests that different perspectives and socio-political environments may lead to different understandings of what is ethically salient. It also highlights, with Gallina (2010) and Mäntärri–van der Kuip (2014; 2016), the significance of the ideological contexts for practice.

Finally, other studies reach more positive conclusions about the potential for social workers' ethical agency. Two qualitative studies, with 20 and 15 participants respectively, investigate ethical challenges attendant on environmental issues in Australia (McKinnon, 2013)** and social media in clinical practice in the US (Mishna *et al.* 2012**). Similarly, a survey of 373 Oklahoma social workers investigated the social justice implications of environmental issues (Nesmith and Smyth, 2015***) and another of 88 assorted practitioners, including social workers, explored the ethics of online engagement (Anderson and Guyton, 2013)**. Together, these studies present a picture of participants embracing emerging ethical challenges, albeit hampered by their own lack of familiarity with the emerging terrain (Mishna *et al.*; Anderson and Guyton; Nesmith and Smyth) or organisational inertia (McKinnon *et al.*) A Tasmanian study, variously discussed from perspectives of risk, fear and messages for practice (Stanford 2008**; Stanford 2010**; Stanford 2011**), similarly highlights the role of courage in ethical practice. Using a grounded theory

methodology, Stanford analysed transcripts of interviews with 18 social workers asked first to talk about a troubling practice episode and then the attendant risks they had perceived. Stanford (2008, p.210) concludes that risk is a multi-faceted concept, and finds (unlike Fenton, 2015, above) that participants are not necessarily as unthinkingly compliant with conservative social forces as the literature tends to imply. Rather, most prioritised service user need despite fears of being blamed, harmed or harmful (Stanford, 2010). Furthermore, echoing Brannelly (2006), an ethic of care orientation characterised those who did so, and an unreflective acceptance of professional codes and organisational settings those who did not (Stanford, 2011). Similarly, Fine and Teram (2013), revisiting the same Canadian study addressed in their earlier paper (Fine and Teram, 2009) discuss participants' reactions to moral injustice. Noting that responses to this are required by many professional social work codes, Fine and Teram argue that nonetheless many social workers appear not to act. However, they go on to cite examples given by their own participants of moral courage: 'potential sacrifices whether in terms of job security, stressful collegial relationships and possible marginalisation' (p.1321). They conclude that in the absence of workplaces that champion and support ethical practice both overt and covert responses to injustice are needed – so, in neoliberal contexts, 'bold and heroic actions' (p.1327).

3.3 Conclusion: social work ethics in qualified practice in summary

This overview of the empirical literature with qualified social worker participants permits some general conclusions. Quantitative research suggests that social work ethics may be marked for qualified social workers by tensions between espoused ethics and actual practice, with personal values both relevant and multi-faceted. It also notes the negative effects that practitioners report as deriving from the ethical constraints imposed by organisational demands, including the impact of neoliberal regimes. Intrinsic to their methodologies is that while these studies provide information about attitudes they are unable to offer insight into individual understanding, or into how social work ethics is experienced. The qualitative studies, however, echo and expand this picture. They convey organisational pressures as stressful or ethically difficult, with practitioners invariably not finding support within their agencies, or even the profession: ethical decision-making may be lonely. While some practitioners challenge administrative constraints, this is often by covert or individualistic means. Their responses reflect different balances struck between compliance with professional and organisational expectations on the one hand, and flexibility on the other. Overall, the literature suggests that social workers tend to understand service users in terms of individual circumstances rather than wider structural issues, and that specific contexts for practice generate highly situated ethical challenges. Not all participants meet the profession's ethical expectations, and organisational drivers at times overshadow concern for service users. Nonetheless, resolving dilemmas can be a positive experience. Reflection is cited as

characteristic of social workers who do not passively accept prevailing norms, and there are indications that if ethical discussion is perceived as safe, it is welcomed. Furthermore, studies also raise questions for social work education. Some do it explicitly. Csikai (2004) and Linzer, Conboy and Ain (2003) simply recommend more, to equip social workers for the ethical element of their role. Others note more specific educational challenges. Ulrich *et al.* (2007) recognise the difficulties inherent in staff shortages; Kaplan (2006) concludes that classroom teaching does not in itself appear to develop skills of critical reflection; DiFranks (2008) notes educators' role in modelling ethical conduct. For Fenton (2014), a priority for educators is to instill and assess students' understanding of social justice. Together, the studies convey that social work ethics for qualified social workers is a complex, challenging and potentially troubling activity. Moreover, while relatively few of the studies are from the UK, given international commonalities with regard to inter-professional working, austerity and the impact of organisations, it is reasonable to infer that the same may be true here. This means that Preston-Shoot's 'ethical literacy' (Preston-Shoot 2011, p.188, and see Chapter Two) is something that educators must equip students with as effectively as possible if they, the profession, and ultimately service users, are to thrive.

This summary of empirically-based knowledge about social work ethics with regard to qualified practice ends this chapter. The next turns to the more immediate context for the study: social work ethics from the perspective of students.

Chapter Four: Social work ethics in progress: empirical studies with student participants

This chapter reviews 57 papers reporting 56 studies whose participants are students on qualifying social work courses. 33 studies have primarily quantitative methodologies and 23 qualitative. Papers were subject to the search, filter and evaluation processes described in the previous chapter. The review is organised into three sections, addressing social work ethics from different but overlapping perspectives in turn: career motivation, becoming a social worker, and as actualised in ethical reasoning, learning and practice. A short conclusion then summarises the messages from the literature included in the chapter as a whole. Studies span 12 countries and have student participant populations drawn from different stages of Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work qualifying programmes. Five studies also include qualified, employed social workers as participants.

The studies share four broadly similar characteristics with those with qualified participants alone. First, while participants tend to be younger than in the previous chapter they are otherwise generally demographically alike, being predominantly white and female. Second, the volume of studies gathers pace in more recent years, with increasing variety in country of origin and methodological approach. Third, little research - five primarily qualitative and three quantitative studies - collects data from participants who are studying in the UK, with just six of these eight having students based in England as participants. Fourth, the largest single group of studies

(33) is from the US. Most (26) of these are quantitative or principally quantitative, with data collected in surveys and sample sizes ranging from 36 (Levy and Edmiston, 2015) to 7,412 (Limb and Organista, 2003, 2006). The last two of these points mean that as in the previous chapter, while social work's somewhat equivalent international identities permit conclusions of general relevance, empirically-based knowledge about UK experience is slight. The implications of this for the present study will be discussed at the end of the chapter. As for the last chapter, a summary evidence chart is provided at Appendix B.

4.1 Career motivation

The majority of the studies that illuminate social work ethics in the context of students' career motivations are from the US. Most are also quantitative. This means that although they include examples of good quality research, their methods preclude insight into individual participants' understanding of ethics. Three studies echo US debates, noted in the previous chapter, about whether social work has moved away from its core value of service to poorer people. Butler (1990)** notes earlier research findings that more US social work students intended to work as private therapists on graduation than with disadvantaged service users (Rubin and Johnson, 1984, cited in Butler). Surveying 265 entrants to a MSW course in New York State, and adapting Rubin and Johnson's instrument Butler investigated which service user groups and aspects of practice participants found most appealing. He

found that nearly two-thirds anticipated careers in private practice. Nonetheless, over 90 per cent were also drawn to social work's traditional service users and activities, and so Butler argues that his findings refute claims that social work had lost sight of its traditional concerns. However, noting welfare cuts and the higher remuneration and status afforded private practice, he cautions that career paths are shaped by social climate as well as personal ambitions, thus broadening the debate and raising points for consideration beyond the US. Two studies offer a longitudinal perspective. Hanson and McCullagh (1995)** similarly allude to 1980s research but note more varied conclusions about students' goals than Butler. Surveying ten successive BSW cohorts enrolling at a mid-western university (total N = 804), Hanson and McCullagh found a range of motivations for wanting to study social work. They conclude that suppositions that the 'self-centered spirit of the eighties' (p.28) had changed social work students' traditional motivations were unfounded: a desire to serve others was most often reported, albeit alongside more explicitly self-directed considerations. More recently, Mizrahi and Dodd (2013)** surveyed 255 MSW students at the beginning and end of their course in New York City and report that social work's dual altruistic and self-serving concerns were evident at both points. However, they found too that by the end of their course more students expressed commitment to social activism, an expectation of all National Association of Social Work (NASW) members (NASW 2008, cited in Mizrahi and Dodd). Csikai and Rozensky (1997)** take a broader historical perspective, noting the social justice imperatives that drove the pioneer social workers of the early twentieth century. Using an instrument developed for their study with 145 MSW and BSW Pittsburgh participants, they found like Hanson and McCullagh that most were motivated

primarily by altruism. They also offer insight into the nature of altruism itself: participants generally reported it as internalised trait rather than resulting from external factors suggested by the researchers, such as a troubled family background or the presence of role models. Moreover, younger, female and MSW students tended to be more altruistic than others – although for MSW students this was alongside greater considerations regarding career development.

Three studies draw upon existing survey data collected from enrolling Californian MSW students over a decade from 1991, which included responses to questions about values and career motivations as well as local welfare issues. Concurring with Butler (1990), Limb and Organista (2003**, p.92) find most of their 7,412 participants attracted by 'the lure of private practice'. However, the picture is not one-sided, as participants also reported that they were attracted to working with people facing economic disadvantage. The authors claim, with Hanson and McCullagh (1995), that their study offers a compelling rebuttal to 1980s fears. Despite this, they note too that while over half the participants showed 'liberal-leaning views' about the causes of poverty (p.105), they generally did not see political and economic change as a desirable solution. They also found black and especially American Indian students most likely to express motivations reflective of a social justice orientation. In a second study (Limb and Organista, 2006**) the authors amplify this picture, comparing responses from 6,987 students at entry and 3,451 at graduation, and conclude that black students are also more likely than white students to maintain a social justice orientation throughout their course. The authors acknowledge that the relatively small number of American Indian

participants may have compromised their specific findings with regard to this group. However, they argue that together their two studies suggest noteworthy parallels between black students' motivations and social work's traditional mission, unlike Csikai and Rozensky (1997) for whom white students were the more socially activist at enrolment. Furthermore, and contradicting Hanson and McCullagh, they suggest in the later paper that this affinity may be borne out of personal experiences of difficulties similar to those of service users. Thus, evidence drawn from these studies regarding any relationship between ethnicity and social work values is mixed, and raises questions of the geographical and cultural context of ethnicity. In the final study included here which drew on the same database, Han and Chow, (2010)** found that students in practice learning settings that prioritised social justice rather than individualistic perspectives tended to maintain these themselves. This study raises two useful points. First, like Csikai and Rozensky and Mizrahi and Dodd (2013), it suggests complex relationships between students' ethical motivation, demographic characteristics and educational experiences. Second, the authors note that for some students there appeared to be a decline in enthusiasm for their chosen profession over time. Their conclusion, that this might reflect 'emotional exhaustion' (p.217), suggests that pressures on social work values (see Chapter Three) may not solely occur in qualified practice, but start in the process of education. This is an important point for educators.

Together, these US studies suggest that students' motivation to study social work is a complex phenomenon, embedded in particular national circumstances and demographics. Quantitative research from elsewhere supports this. Two European

studies note a specific religious context. Jensen and Aamodt (2002)** surveyed 908 students embarking on various professionally qualifying courses in Norway, in what they argue is an increasingly secularised society with an attendant diminution of Christian values including self-sacrifice. They found social work and nursing entrants clearly more altruistic in intent than engineers but with self-directed motivations also present, echoing US findings above. In conclusion, the authors offer the insight that self and other directed motivations should not be seen as in opposition to one another, but rather as offering educators different opportunities for engagement. For example, they contend that self-directedness might be more effective than altruism in facilitating resilience and should therefore be cultivated, especially given contemporary pressures on the social work profession. Here, they echo Han and Chow (2010) in relating student motivation to the future of social work, arguing the need for education to promote the development of committed and robust practitioners. Conversely, in an Italian study, Campanini and Facchini (2013)** note the significance of faith, rather than its absence, in their survey of 1,893 social work undergraduates. They found that while participants expressed their motivations in altruistic terms they spoke more like volunteers than developing professionals, emphasising a desire to help others within specific relationships with individuals rather than as a professional competence. Campanini and Facchini attribute this in part to the continuing influence in Italy of a Roman Catholic emphasis on personal, rather than professional, ethical commitment. They note too the relatively recent incorporation of social work into Italian universities and its low professional status, reflected in the socio-economic profile of participants who are more likely to be lower middle class than most undergraduates. Thus, while in the US literature an

individualistic ethical orientation is connected with seeking a higher professional status, in Italy it seems that it may reflect a lower – indicating again the significance of national context. Campanini and Facchini similarly relate student motivation to the future of the profession. Noting the high drop out rate of Italian social work students, they suggest that greater understanding of students' ethical starting points may enable educators to challenge unrealistic ideals, by the promotion of reflexivity. Finally here, Ngai and Cheung (2009)** echo Han and Chow in their study with a total of 165 Hong Kong social work undergraduate participants, with samples from each year group. Investigating the interplay between emotional exhaustion, altruism and idealism, Ngai and Cheung find that the first two of these are positively correlated. They note too the protective factor of confidence in one's career, suggesting like Jensen and Aamodt that self-directed motivations may support resilience and so should be nurtured rather than viewed with suspicion. Furthermore, they found that motivation appears to vary during education – in particular, participants in the second year of their course were more idealistic, and also more emotionally exhausted, than those in the first or third. Some of the authors' conclusions – for example that emotional exhaustion may be ameliorated if their father is a role model for endurance in the workplace – may reflect Hong Kong demographics. Over 90 per cent of the study's participants live with parents and their average age is 20, different from the UK picture. However, like Han and Chow, Ngai and Cheung suggest that investigation of students' ethics at different stages of social work education might be fruitful in elucidating what may be a changing phenomenon. It also points again to the personal cost – and ultimately, the potential cost to the profession - of some forms of motivation.

Four quantitative or mixed methods studies cast light on UK students' ethical motivation, with two of these including UK social work student participants alongside those from elsewhere. Christie and Kruk (1998)* take as their starting point earlier research which concluded that social work recruits were essentially radicals, engaged in 'primitive political rebellion' (Pearson, 1973, p.209, cited in Christie and Kruk). Noting the research agenda Pearson set, on reviewing subsequent studies Christie and Kruk conclude with Hanson and McCullagh (1995) that the picture gleaned of student motivation is more mixed. They argue too that motivations are inevitably historically and politically situated, and thus that research decades old offers very limited insight into contemporary practice. Aiming to address this gap, they present their own study investigating the motivations of 95 first year social work students in England and Canada to whom they administered questionnaires designed to elicit incentives, disincentives and concerns. The study identifies different emphases in the groups' responses, with somewhat different primary disincentives. For example, students studying in England tended to be more discouraged by concerns about workloads, and those in Canada by doubting their personal competence. However, overall the authors report a 'broad but sketchy' concurrence in students' motivations to enter the profession: opportunities both to work directly with service users and to have a profession (p.27). They add that demographic factors appeared to have little significance, although acknowledge that any conclusions regarding ethnicity should be cautiously drawn as the ethnic designations participants chose for themselves varied between countries such that meaningful comparison was compromised. Moreover, they found that 'visible minority ethnic group' participants were 'more strongly attracted by the possibility

of work with clients' (Christie and Kruk, p.27), perhaps chiming with Limb and Organista (2003; 2006). Moreover, participants' free text answers show some questioning whether they want to be social workers at all, or how the profession may have changed by the end of their course. Thus, the study suggests that, for its participants in England, motivation is a complex phenomenon, as other studies have shown it to be elsewhere. Similarly taking an international perspective, D'Cruz *et al.* (2002)** collected data from participants from universities in England, Australia, Canada and the US at the beginning of their studies, investigating ethical motivation through the lens of gender. Here, the authors asked participants about what they believe the goals of social work to be, as their chosen profession. First, they conclude that the gendered differences in moral thinking proposed by Gilligan (1982, cited in D'Cruz *et al.*) are not clearly reflected in their data. However, they note that having interrogated relationships between gender, age, geography and responses, they are struck by both the 'highly textured weave' of 'social work ethical perspectives' (D'Cruz *et al.* p.164) and the lack of any consistent pattern. The authors recommend further research, suggesting that qualitative studies would offer a complementary perspective to their own in terms of insight into individual participants' experiences and understanding. They also suggest that social work educators should be mindful of the range of ethical stances that students may hold at the point of enrolment on their professionally qualifying course.

Stevens *et al.* (2010)** contributed to the Social Work Degree Evaluation commissioned by the Department of Health. Surveying 2871 undergraduate and postgraduate students at different points across their course from universities across

England, they found altruistic drivers most prevalent, albeit together with ambitions for career progression. Further data, drawn from 168 participants, were qualitatively analysed but provide limited information about individual experience given the focus group study design. Demographic factors were scrutinised in more detail by the use of regression analysis and were found to have some salience. For example, students with previous work experience in the wider social care sector ranked altruism more highly than those with paid experience with social work employers, echoing questions about the relationship between ethical motivation and employment setting raised by Han and Chow (2010). In conclusion, the authors argue that their study has reinforced earlier research in pointing to the multi-faceted character of students' motivation, with altruism dominating alongside more pragmatic concerns. They also highlight potential conflict between motivations and practice, especially given changing policy frameworks, and note the importance for educators of nurturing 'initial altruistic urges' (Stevens *et al.* p.33) in the interests of both individual wellbeing and the profession. Wilson and McCrystal (2007)** investigated 117 Belfast social work students' career goals at the beginning and end of their course. This study illustrates further the significance of local circumstances, noting Northern Irish recruitment and retention issues alongside the enduring impact of sectarianism. Among other findings with more specifically local application, Wilson and McCrystal (2007) concur with studies above that altruistic goals prevailed. They report too that 54 per cent of their participants mentioned having experienced 'potentially traumatic family circumstances' (p.42) in their personal lives. Wilson and McCrystal (p.43) note the psychotherapeutic concept of the 'wounded healer', which conveys the possible damage to service users if practitioners carry biases arising

from unresolved personal trauma. Conversely, participants in this study generally reported personal experiences, including parents' marriage problems, bereavement and addiction, as potentially useful to their professional development, facilitating understanding and empathy. This echoes Limb and Organista (2006) regarding the benefits of personally difficult experiences for a social work career. Equally, it challenges Czikai and Rozensky's (1997) finding of their unimportance. This study also concludes, again unlike Csikai and Rozensky, that role models may be significant in shaping career motivations. 27 per cent of participants stated that a social worker was the most significant influence on their choice of career, with 19 per cent citing a family member.

Fewer qualitative than quantitative studies investigate ethical motivation. Six of these are from the US. Osteen (2011)*** is an important paper for my research, given its good quality and fine-grained attention to individual experience. Using semi-structured interviews within a grounded theory approach, Osteen explored 20 MSW students' motivation, values and professional identity. The figure he develops, with multi-directional and connected domains of 'motivation', 'evaluation and negotiation' and 'integration' (p.430) points to and further elucidates the complex and dynamic relationship between students and their intended profession. While Osteen makes measured claims for his results, acknowledging the study's limitations, his conclusion that for his participants 'doing develops out of being' (p.427) points to the intensely personal nature of professional motivation and its link with identity. Two studies explore the relationship between motivation and faith. Singletary *et al.* (2006)** employed interpretative analysis to elucidate the narratives ten students

constructed about their vocation in semi-structured interviews. Themes developed were the role of influential people (including social workers as role models, echoing Wilson and McCrystal, 2007), the relationship between vocation and faith, and previous educational experience. The importance of faith and the way it influences participants' sense of vocation is strikingly conveyed by verbatim extracts from interview transcripts. For example, one participant describes how her development as a social worker had led her to a deeper understanding of her Christianity: 'The more I really started looking at it, the more I was like, 'Christ was like a social worker!'' (p.194). Similarly, Chappell-Deckert and Canda (2016)*** report that their three participants found social work values closely mirroring those of their Mennonite faith. The fact that these programmes were run by religiously affiliated establishments, where the relationship between social work and Christianity is explicit, limits their direct messages for the UK profession, which as noted in Chapter Two is less characterised by overt links with Christianity. Nonetheless, motivation emerges as a rich concept, and the positive experiences recounted of personal and professional ethical congruence raise questions about the significance for individuals of this interface – and implications for situations where it is discordant.

D'Aprix *et al.* (2004)* revisit the concerns noted above regarding a two-tier social work profession in the US, adding that private practitioners tend to serve better-off, white service users. Reviewing earlier research, they draw the stark conclusion that MSW students 'seem not to be amenable to being changed through the educational process' (p.271). Thus, they argue, close similarity between students' own and social work's values at the point of admission is essential, as dissonance will not only cause

stress to individuals, but also ultimately compromise the identity of the profession itself. Their own study investigates students' career goals in terms of their underpinning values, Having collected data in focus groups with a total of 23 first – year MSW students drawn from three universities, D'Aprix *et al.* conclude that students are generally focused more on self-directed than altruistic goals. Moreover, they see no inherent contradiction between being a social worker and working primarily with people who are financially comfortable. The authors acknowledge that their sample is small, and it appears too that verbatim contributions from participants were recorded selectively rather than full transcripts being considered, which compromises the quality of the study. Nonetheless, the authors usefully conclude that educators should engage with students as they are, rather than as the profession's altruistic tradition suggests they should be. In this study, the use of focus groups limits the degree of detail provided with regard to individual understanding. Paat (2016**, p.234) offers a richer picture in investigating 40 immigrant or ethnic minority BSW students' career choices from the perspective of the 'American Dream' in which education offers immigrants an important route out of poverty. Having conducted semi-structured interviews, Paat developed categories informed by a life-course perspective, and concludes that participants' approaches to the profession are diverse and multi-faceted, with complex relationships between personal life, career goals and altruism. A message for educators is that in order to encourage non-traditional social work students, understanding of their idiosyncratic circumstances and attendant need for support is key. Warde (2009)*** echoes this in a focus group study with nine black or Hispanic male BSW and MSW students, who recognise the particular insights they offer in a predominantly white and female

profession. Furthermore, these participants note too the influence on their career choice of having had positive contact with a social worker, like Singletary (2006) and Wilson and McCrystal (2007).

Finally, in the single wholly qualitative study to investigate UK students' motivation, Duschinsky and Kirk (2013)** held focus groups with 80 first-year students in Northumbria and used discourse analysis to identify discourses of altruism, professional status and personal experience. Their research interest was primarily students' political stance, and this and their group interview strategy mean that insights into ethics and individual experience are limited. As in other studies, the authors recognise the situated nature of motivation. However, rather than framing it in terms of prevailing policy (Christie and Kruk, 1998; Stevens *et al.* 2010), they construct it as reflective of dominant discourse. Equally, the students' responses variously demonstrated the radical orientation articulated by Pearson (1973, cited in Christie and Kruk, 1998) and more conservative positions, both being played out in the contemporary 'neoliberal discursive terrain' (Duschinsky and Kirk, p.587).

4.2 The developing social worker: values, identity and socialisation

Other studies investigate social work ethics in terms of students' developing affiliation and identification with social work and its goals. Miller (2013)** explores values through a lens of professional socialisation. She argues that this spans the 'explicit and implicit curricula', the latter comprising the 'values, attitudes and

norms' of a given profession and being under-researched in social work (p.369). Miller goes on to report a study that surveyed attitudes towards their profession of 489 participants, including social work students at different stages of their professional education and one and five years after graduation. The study is broad in its scope and not all its findings are pertinent here. However, Miller found that age was positively correlated with adherence to social work values, men were more idealistic than women, and participants with a higher adherence to professional values tended to be less inclined to seek managerial positions. She also found that participants tended not to report career choice being influenced by personal experience. Here, she concurs with Hansen and McCullagh (1995) but not Singletary (2006) and Wilson and McCrystal (2007). Like Limb and Organista (2003), she found black participants more committed to social work values than others. The details of Miller's results compound rather than clarify questions about relationships between values and demographic characteristics, suggesting again a 'textured weave' (D'Cruz *et al.* 2002, p.164). Nevertheless, the concept of an implicit curriculum usefully highlights the potentially transformative nature of social work education, in that students are not simply learning, but becoming.

Other studies explore students' developing ethical congruence with social work by investigating their values. Of these eight are quantitative, including seven from the US. Some address attitudes towards particular oppressed groups (Hancock, Waites and Klederas, 2012**; Lennon-Dearing and Delavega, 2015**); others focus more on specific practice or societal issues (Finn, 2002**; Johnson *et al.* 2006**; Carney and McCarren, 2012*; Miller and Hayward, 2014**; Prior and Quinn, 2012**; Wong and

Yuen, 2013**). Given their use of survey-based methods, and with participant numbers ranging from 58 to 378, these studies do not give access to ethical meaning for individual participants. This means that despite the good quality of some of them, they are of limited relevance for the present study. However, three noteworthy points emerge. One is the significance for some participants of particular service user characteristics. In the US, Lennon-Dearing and Delavega (2015, p.418) investigated student and qualified social workers' 'attitudes and behaviors positive toward the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] community and rejection of legislation discriminating against this population.' While they found the level of acceptance high in both participant groups, students were less accepting than qualified practitioners. The authors recommend greater attention to social justice and cultural competence, both before and after professional qualification. Their study also suggests that the process of becoming a social worker may entail existing values being challenged – or at least, coming to be differently reported. The second point arising from this group of studies is the varied relationships between social work values and faith/spirituality. Conceptualising the latter as 'connectedness', Prior and Quinn (p.174) hypothesised that it would correlate negatively with values of social justice but found that this was not the case. This concurs with studies above with regard to motivation (Chappell-Deckert and Canda, 2016; Singletary, 2006), which equally reported a sound fit between participants' faith and their career ambitions. Johnson *et al.* (2006) found otherwise. Noting US arguments that Evangelical and other religiously conservative social workers were inaccurately characterised as hostile towards gay and poor people (Hodge, 2003, cited in Johnson *et al.*), the authors devised a 'religiosity scale' (p.175). Using this alongside Pike's

Values Inventory (1996, cited in Johnson *et al.* 2006), developed specifically for pedagogic use, they found that religiously conservative participants scored less highly on the values index than others. Thus, it seems that any consideration of the relationship between social work and spiritual values must take account of specific beliefs and attitudes. Third, Finn (2002) and Miller and Hayward (2014) investigated attitudes and actions with regard to online psychotherapeutic intervention and environmental issues respectively, with Miller and Hayward concluding that 'environmental literacy' (Jones, 2010, cited in Miller and Hayward, p.190) is a useful concept for social work educators. Together, these studies suggest, like others in the previous chapter, the broadening field of ethics in social work.

Four qualitative studies throw greater light on the lived experience of values and values acquisition. In Greece, Dedotsi, Young and Broadhurst 2016)** interviewed 14 social work students at the end of their studies in a grounded theory study investigating anti-oppressive values in the climate of the Greek economic crisis. They express concern at students' individualistic responses to structural issues, in particular a tendency to blame oppressed service users for their predicament. Three UK studies together offer a more nuanced perspective. In Scotland, Woodward and McKay (2012)** used written responses to vignettes and focus groups to explore undergraduate students' understanding of social work values at the beginning and end of their first year of study. Noting Higham's individual, structural and emancipatory value dimensions (Higham, 2006, cited in Woodward and McKay), the authors found students at the second data collection point applying values to work with individuals, but less able to challenge structural disadvantage. Woodward and

McKay conclude that while values may be more difficult to write than talk about, social justice is an essential value to uphold as a defence against prevalent neoliberal practice contexts. Hughes (2011)** conducted an appreciative inquiry with five undergraduate students nearing qualification in England, using interviews and an interactive workshop. The study touches only briefly on social work ethics, but offers the useful pedagogic insight that challenges to personal values, while exciting and transformative, are potentially unsettling. Hughes notes the importance for educators of recognising and supporting the transformative process students are undergoing, and assisting by modelling appropriate values and behaviour. This suggests that role models may be ethically significant not only in shaping career motivation, as noted above (Singletary, 2006; Wilson and McCrystal, 2007), but also with regard to their role in consolidating this once students are engaged in their professional education. Wiles (2013)** interviewed seven final year students to identify the discourses they used in discussing their developing professional identity, as part of a larger study investigating the meanings for students of the [then] new regulatory requirements for the profession. She categorised discourses that variously conceptualise identity as a professional trait, a feature of the professional community, and as work in progress. Adherence to professional values and ethics are noted by participants as elements of the first two of these, with tension between personal and professional values an aspect of the third. Usefully echoing Osteen (2011) but with regard to England, Wiles concludes that in her research professional identity emerged as a complex concept, with its development dynamic and multi-faceted. She also highlights the tension participants describe between their personal lives and their developing social work persona, with one student describing having

become ‘poles apart’ from [non-social work] friends (p.861). Wiles reports that this is articulated in part as a clash between different social classes, and contextualises this finding in literature relating similar issues in professions other than social work. As Wiles notes, while her methodological approach enables insight into resources provided for participants by shared discourses, it does not provide a similar richness in respect of individual participants’ contributions. Relevant for educators, however, and echoing Miller (2013) she recommends that opportunities be provided for students to explore the complex professional identity formation they are experiencing and to recognise that it is an ongoing process rather than an event. She also raises the issue of possible advantages for students of opportunities for reflection outside assessed tasks – although her vision of TCSW offering a useful practice community proved short-lived.

Two studies explore the relationship between personal and professional values from a cross-cultural perspective. In a Canadian study, Calderwood *et al.* (2009)** carried out semi-structured interviews with five social work students and two recent graduates social work graduates who had moved to Canada as adults, from countries of origin including Bangladesh, Grenada, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland and Somalia. The researchers found a broad consistency between participants’ home and Canadian values, and between their home values and those they encountered in the course of their social work education. A notable exception was that participants reported that their home values placed greater emphasis than they found in Canada on the importance of family. The general sense was that participants’ home values both prioritised the family’s needs over their own and regarded family networks as a

source of support and welfare. Conversely, participants characterised 'the Western way' as being 'all about me' (p.117). Chung (2006)*, describing group discussions with 10 Asian American social work students, concluded that participants experienced a lack of validation for their inherent cultural characteristics. In particular, their tendency to be unassertive was viewed as a deficit, rather than a feature of the modesty and deference that they had been brought up to cultivate. Participants also described the difficulties they experienced when expected to challenge older people, given their ingrained respect for elders. Chung concludes that awareness of educational racism, and supporting ethnic minority students in reframing cultural traits within the requirements of the social work role, may enable them to develop what they have to offer their chosen profession. She acknowledges that her insider status may compromise her results, drawn in part from student accounts of group discussions she herself facilitated, given the traits of compliance and deference she has identified as present in her participants. Nonetheless, her study raises important questions about how far professional norms reflect dominant values, and thus the unrecognised ethical challenge ethnic minority students may face.

This section of the chapter concludes with studies whose perspective on social work ethics is professional identity formation. Three are quantitative, including two Israeli studies that draw on the same data to investigate the parts played by supervision, personal resources including empathy, and values in the development of professional identity. Shlomo, Levy and Itzhaky (2012)**, having administered questionnaires to 160 final year undergraduate students in Israel, concluded that

students' satisfaction with supervision, together with their personal values, made a direct contribution. However, they also found that where satisfaction with supervision was low, other factors – social values including co-operation and helpfulness towards others – might then play a compensatory role. The authors note the limited scope of their study, including its sample from one course at one point in time and the variables that were not included, and recommend further research. Nonetheless, their articulation of the 'systems of resources in the students' environment' (p.249) and the flexible relationship between them, points to the individually varied and dynamic nature of professional identity. In a further paper (Levy, Shlomo and Itzhaky, 2014**) the same authors illustrate this further, subjecting their data to complex path analysis and devising a figure to show the multi-directional relationships between the factors and domains. In this tripartite model, 'inputs' – satisfaction with supervision and personal resources – contribute to the development of 'throughputs' – values and empathy (p.754). The complexity and individuality of professional identity formation articulated by these studies suggests that qualitative approaches might be well suited to explore it further, although the authors do not suggest this. Osteen (2011), in his investigation of the motivations of 20 US students discussed above, also throws useful light on identity, by qualitative means. Osteen notes that the relationship between personal and professional identities has been variously construed in terms of which is dominant (Archer, 2001, and Wenger *et al.* 2002, cited in Osteen). In order to explore this, he includes an interview question that asks participants whether they regard themselves as social workers. Responses lead Osteen (2011) to differentiate integrated, non-integrated and evolving identities, explicated by participants in the context of rich personal

accounts that suggest that identity reflects individual understanding and experience and sometimes an ambivalent relationship with the profession. This echoes Christie and Kruk (1998), who had found that not all SWS intended using their qualification to practice social work at all. Osteen also highlights, with Wiles (2013) that personal and professional value congruence does not necessarily mean that students do not experience difficulties: illustrating this, one participant reports the challenges presented by encounters with her racist homophobic family.

4.3 The developing social worker: learning and doing

Other studies have investigated how students put social work ethics in action, from perspectives of confidentiality, moral reasoning, inter-professional working, practice learning and innovative learning opportunities. Saxon, Jacinto and Dziegielewski (2006)** investigated students' attitudes to confidentiality, which they noted as one of the many facets of ethical decision-making in practice. Drawing on 80 participants' responses to a case scenario, with space given for narrative rationale, they found that around two-thirds of their sample would breach confidentiality in a situation where service user safety was a consideration. Participants further into their course were more likely to do this than first year students, who appeared more principle-driven. Moreover, the study's inclusion of both undergraduate and postgraduate participants led to the authors' noting that, while there was no significant differences between the responses of the two groups, the postgraduate students seemed to struggle more with the scenario as presented, seeking clarification and

further information. Saxon, Jacinto and Dziegielewski speculate that this may be due to the greater emphasis on critical thinking in postgraduate education. They conclude that ethical decision-making is a complex process, often without simple right or wrong answers, and which like the vignette used in the study, students may find difficult. Landau (1999)** explored ethical reasoning over time with 590 student and qualified participants. The study employed vignettes and the Defining Issues Test, an instrument that rates ethical judgment by measuring how much weight is given to 'principled moral considerations' in resolving an ethical dilemma (Landau, p.62). Landau (p.67) found 'no significant differences in the ethical judgment of first year social work students, third year students, and practicing social workers'. However, she discerned changes in decision-making orientation. Final year students tended to show more client-centredness and inclination towards non-intervention - suggesting a commitment to empowerment - than those at the start of their course. She found too that the only demographic factor positively correlated with higher ethical judgment was being religious or very religious. This presents a different picture to Johnson *et al.* (2006) who had found participants high in religiosity less adherent to social work values than others. For Johnson *et al* the religiously committed participants were (incidentally) Christian. In Landau's study, they were Jewish, reinforcing the point that faith is an umbrella term and that its meaning needs to be considered in the light of specific circumstances. With regard to the apparently limited impact of education, Nathanson, Giffords and Calderon (2011)* counter Landau's conclusions. The primary aim of this study was to show the efficacy of the Nathanson and Gifford Ethics Scale in measuring changes in student values, and thus monitoring educational standards. Building on a values inventory

developed by Pike (1996, cited in Nathanson Giffords and Calderon) the authors argue that rather than measuring values in terms of simple adherence, it is more useful to recognise the modifying role of context. Thus, moving away from Pike's 'discrete value adherence' (p.136) the Nathanson and Gifford Ethics Scale – like Landau - presents participants with a series of practice vignettes to which they are asked to respond. Reporting the scale's use in a pilot study with a total of 178 postgraduate students and alumni from three US campuses, and at different stages of their social work education, the authors conclude that it is reliable and valid. They find too that scores vary according to participants' educational institution, arguing that students' respective urban and suburban backgrounds are significant, as ethical development represents a fusion of taught input and personal morality. They conclude that educators must be mindful not only of curricula but of students' existing positions in terms of societally inculcated values. They note too that growth in ethical awareness is discernible over time, with education appearing to ameliorate differences between and amongst student groups, and also to increase in employment.

Two studies compare social work students' reasoning with those from other disciplines. In Hong Kong, Yeung *et al*. (2010)** found in focus groups with 30 each social work and nursing students that the former were driven more by imperatives of service- user self-determination, and the latter by care. Meanwhile in a Finnish study, Juujärvi (2006)**, administering questionnaires two years apart to 59 social work, nursing and police students in an investigation of moral reasoning, found social work students more prone to care than police students. For Yeung *et al*.'s

nursing student participants, however, the care they prioritise is physical; as one of them points out, 'we nurses would put physical health as our first priority' (p.1582). Juujärvi drew instead on the richer concept articulated in the ethic of care, and the philosophical debates that contrast it to justice (see Chapter Two). Neither study offers direct insight into individual experience, although Juujaärvi suggests that students undergo an ethical balancing process, with care and justice orientations coexisting. Together, however, these studies point to the need for close attention to meaning when using ethical vocabulary, suggesting the utility of qualitative research in clarifying participants' understanding.

Other studies investigate social work ethics in the context of educational experiences. For some, the focus is the classroom. Two studies investigated changes in students' attitudes towards aspects of social justice after taught input. Van Soest (1996)** administered pre and post-test surveys to 222 postgraduate students at two US universities. They found that having attended teaching on oppression correlated positively with both a belief in social justice and engagement in advocacy for marginalised groups including gay people and African Americans. A decade later, in another US study, Van Voorhis and Hostetter (2006)** drew similar conclusions on surveying 52 participants. Together these studies reinforce further the role of professionally qualifying courses in delivering not simply knowledge, but socialisation. Moreover, and relevant for the present research, Van Soest also asked participants about their emotional response to the teaching, and found 'belief in a just world' (no page number) accompanied by distress at examples of injustice. She concludes that that learning about oppression can be profoundly troubling,

potentially leading to either a defensive entrenchment of existing beliefs or a disturbing dissonance between longstanding previous perceptions of the world and the new insights offered by education. Sanders and Hoffman (2010)** note the continuing debate in professional education about the relative efficacy of discrete and infused ethical teaching, but a dearth of research with regard to social work. Seeking to address this, they administer a vignette-based instrument to a total of 144 social work students in three US universities. One institution provides a discrete ethics module and one infuses ethical content throughout the curriculum. The third provides a discrete module with an emphasis on Gert's concept of common morality, which rejects reliance on principles in favour of situated reasoning (Gert, 1998, cited in Sanders and Hoffman). This, the authors argue, is especially useful for social work. Accordingly, they hypothesise that the students taught from this perspective will show the greatest degree of moral judgment, and so respond most comprehensively to the scenarios presented. The hypothesis is upheld, although the authors note limitations of the study and the need for further research to clarify unresolved questions about the teaching of social work ethics. The research design precludes conclusions about individual understanding, however the finding that students' ethical development occurs, albeit to varying extents, regardless of teaching mode, again points to the personal change inherent in social work education beyond mere acquisition of knowledge.

Three studies offer insight into challenges to and opportunities for ethical practice that participants may encounter on placement; one is quantitative and two qualitative. Dodd (2007)** administered questionnaires to 76 US postgraduate

students to investigate ethical dilemmas experienced on placement. She found that concerns most often reported were related to service users' best interests, and points to the importance of having opportunities to reflect. Here, Dodd echoes studies noted above that emphasise the importance for ethical practice of supervision (Shlomo, Levy and Itzhaky, 2012; Levy, Shlomo and Itzhaky, 2014). She also found that students were especially challenged where the field supervisor's practice or guidance contributed to an ethical dilemma. The qualitative studies both focus on students on final placements. In a Canadian study, Bellefeuille and Hemingway (2006)** investigated 26 students' placement experiences using focus groups and reflective writing. Papouli (2016)** also employed written accounts in a Greek study with 32 participants, using a critical incident framework to facilitate reflection on events of significance to the students (Brookfield 1990, cited in Papouli). Both these studies offer insights for the present research. Bellefeuille and Hemingway found that participants' readiness to practice ethically was constrained by fears of being perceived as naïve or troublesome, and of the stability of the placement being jeopardised. Thus, the very role of student, which requires demonstrable engagement with ethical learning and practice, may also make that engagement feel difficult. For Papouli, the range of incidents reported illustrated that ethical meaning for participants was not merely theoretical, but formed and informed in concrete experience, including encounters with service users, field instructors and professionals. She notes too, with Bellefeuille and Hemingway, the potential stress and need for support inherent in ethically difficult situations – especially where service user behaviour is perceived negatively.

Other studies explore student experiences of ethical learning in settings beyond placement or classroom. Lindsey (2005)*** reports a qualitative study investigating the values development of a total of 41 social work students from the US and Scotland engaged in an exchange study programme between 1996 and 2001. Using students' reflective written accounts as data, the study employs an analysis strategy drawn from grounded theory methodology. It finds that overall students report increased commitment to social work and to its values, with categories identified including 'Awareness and Insight Into One's Own Values and Beliefs; Appreciation of Difference, Cultural Sensitivity, and Anti-Discriminatory Practice; Social Justice' (Lindsey, p.236). The study makes cautiously optimistic claims, suggesting that educational exchange, hitherto the preserve of liberal arts courses, is now of increasing relevance for social work given the growing interest in the international dimension to the profession. Furthermore, Lindsey reports differences between the participant groups' responses. In particular, the US participants tended to write about the challenges they experienced to their own values while the Scottish students tended to have theirs confirmed. Lindsey argues that these distinctions reflect both cultural characteristics and also the age profile of each group, suggesting again the inevitably situated nature of social work ethics. Moorhead, Boetto and Bell (2014)** report the results of a mixed-methods evaluation of a short-term programme offering 12 undergraduate and two postgraduate Australian social work students the opportunity to visit India. Employing surveys before and after the visit and workshop discussion, the authors investigated participants' expectations, experiences and changed understandings of themselves and social work. They found that students reported increased self-awareness and a growing sense of personal

congruence with professional values. Moorhead, Boetto and Bell conclude that study abroad offers a useful experiential educational tool, contributing to the development of professional values and identity. Both these studies are potentially compromised by their data being collected as part of assessed activities thus raising questions about participant motivation to take part. However, they raise important questions for my own research about implications for values development when students encounter cultures other than their own - not only in structured educational exchange programmes, but in their own classroom. Similarly, two US studies report the benefits for ethical development of engagement in community projects. Williams and Reeves (2004, p.383)*** investigate 21 postgraduate social work students' experiences of a week spent assisting at a 'burn camp' – a facility run by firefighters for severely burnt children. Using focus groups, journals, and project evaluations to gather data, the study explored values development alongside broader educational outcomes. The authors conclude that both students' professional identity and their commitment to social work values were enhanced by their experience, with extracts of their words effectively conveying a sense of a growing self-awareness and acceptance of difference. Given the study design, what is elucidated about individual experience is limited. However, like Lindsey, and Moorhead, Boetto and Bell above, it suggests that values may be brought into relief, and refined, by exposure to challenging opportunities. Similarly Levy and Edmiston (2015**) report survey data from 36 social work undergraduates who participated in work with a range of community agencies. The limitations of this study mean that findings are slight. Nonetheless participants' general concurrence regarding an increase in reported social work values suggests with Williams and Reeves that values can be clarified,

and professional ethical commitment reinforced, by these innovative educational interventions.

Finally, researchers in Lithuania and the US asked participants to look beyond their education to the ethical challenges and experiences they anticipated they would encounter as qualified practitioners. Offering a multi-cultural perspective, Urbonienė and Leliūgienė (2007)* used questionnaires to investigate the values development of final year students in Lithuania, Belarus and Sweden. In this study students were asked by means of an open question to consider what might make it difficult for them to follow social work values in the future. Participants from all three countries identified value conflicts and inefficient professional organisations as possible barriers. In addition, Lithuanian and Belarussian students also mentioned their sense that some service users were 'unattractive' to them because of their actions, including criminal behaviour, and difficult to understand or respect (p.45). The differences between the three cultures represented in this study, and their consequently various constructions of social work, make it difficult to interpret its findings comparatively, and equally to apply them directly to the UK. However, the study suggests that claims for the universality of social work values must be made with caution. In the US, Kane (2004)** notes the pervasive 'managed care' model noted in the previous chapter and defined here as 'intended to mediate the distance between consumers' demands for service and payers' unwillingness to absorb the cost' (p.400). Surveying 116 postgraduate social work students in Florida, Kane found that they generally had a simplistic understanding of the ethical challenges managed care may present, and advocates for more targeted educational input and the

provision of more placement experience of managed care agencies. This study addresses practice within a regime specific to the US, and does not present information about individual experience. Despite these limitations, noteworthy for the present study is the inference that effective ethical education must respond to local and specific issues. It may also involve disrupting students' expectations – Kane notes with concern that participants seem unaware of the ethical challenges they may need to embrace if they are to be ethically effective practitioners.

4.4 Conclusion: social work ethics in progress in summary

The previous chapter characterised social work ethics in qualified practice as multi-faceted and challenging, marked by tensions between personal and professional values and the constraints of organisational contexts. Despite different international circumstances, ethical engagement was commonly found to be troubling, lonely and exhausting, with support not invariably to hand and individuals negotiating their own solutions. Accordingly, these studies also indicated the importance of effective education, to support students to develop into resilient practitioners able to thrive and practice ethically in this challenging terrain. The present chapter has revealed a similarly complex picture of social work ethics from the perspective of students themselves, with four points especially important for my study. First, there are mixed messages about the significance for understandings of social work ethics of personal experience, roles models and ethnicity, with some students from minority

backgrounds facing particular challenges. Second, students' values are not necessarily congruent with those of their intended profession, with participants placing different degrees of importance on this. Third, simply being a student may add a further difficult dimension to ethical engagement, with social work education comprising explicit and implicit curricula. Finally, organisations may not be ethically supportive. Again, the importance of effective ethical education is evident, for the sake of social work students, the profession and therefore service users.

However, despite intimations of social work ethics as touching on deeply personal and existential questions of identity and values, its meaning for individual students remains under-explored. First, the majority of the studies reviewed here are quantitative in design, offering insight into lived experience by inference only. Second, just eight qualitative studies employed individual interviews, allowing for clarification of individual understanding, and the tendency for analysis to reflect grounded theory principles suggests a concern with theory building, rather than the meaning of the phenomenon. Furthermore, while the literature reviewed in this chapter and the last has shown social work ethics reflective of and shaped by local frameworks and concerns, little research explores UK experiences of social work ethics within contemporary political and educational frameworks. Just one qualitative study based in England uses individual interviews for data collection (Wiles, 2013) and, while this is good quality, its primary focus is not social work ethics but student understanding of professional registration with the GSCC, which no longer exists. The time is ripe, therefore, for research that offers insight into what social work ethics means for students in England today, to inform evidence-based

social work education at a time of professional re-evaluation and change. This is what my study will provide.

Chapter Five: Methodology and methods

This chapter outlines the design and process of the study. First, having revisited the research rationale and question, I present the methodology I employed, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Then, I detail the planning and execution of the project including sampling, data collection and analysis. The chapter goes on to address research ethics and concludes with quality considerations, including the role of reflexivity.

5.1 Research rationale and question

Ethics is fundamental to social work and to social work education (see Chapters One and Two). However, research suggests that social workers' and social work students' experience of ethics is complex and may be troubling, with implications for practitioners' resilience and retention, and the future of the profession (see Chapters Three and Four). Despite this, little research investigates individual students' understanding of ethics, and within this, few studies are from the UK. This gap in the pedagogical knowledge base suggested lines of inquiry for my study. These in turn underpinned the development of my research question and attendant aim and objectives, with the latter sufficiently exploratory in their wording to generate understanding of personal meaning. While these were noted in the general introduction, they are relevant to repeat here.

Question: How do students on an English qualifying social work programme make sense of ethics, in the context of their professional development?

Aim: To investigate the meaning for students of their lived experience of ethics and the significance of this for social work education

Objectives: To investigate

- students' understandings of the values and ethics that inform their motivations to become a social worker
- how students make sense of the relationship between social work values and ethics and their personal ethical principles
- what values and ethics mean to social work students in the course of their practice learning experiences
- how students experience their emerging professional values and ethics
- the implications of the results for social work education within current professional frameworks

The aim and objectives of the study shaped the research approach that I then went on to develop, so that the approach was suited to meeting them and so in turn to provide an answer to my research question.

5.2. Developing a research approach

This section of the chapter addresses the development of the methodology for my study. It includes the underpinning theoretical principles on which the study is based and notes other research approaches I considered before I adopted a phenomenological methodology as best suited to my research objectives.

5.2.1 Theoretical principles

Social research methodologies are generally categorised as either quantitative or qualitative, with data comprising numbers and words respectively (Bryman and Becker, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2013). Here, my study objectives indicated that a quantitative approach would be inappropriate. This is not to say that numbers would be irrelevant: decisions about samples and the significance of emerging results might both involve asking questions with numerical answers. However, the study's aim pointed to a qualitative methodology, that is, one equipped to investigate 'processes, experiences, language and meaning' (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014, p.63). Qualitative research tends to seek '**rich data, 'thick descriptions'** – detailed and complex accounts from each participant' (Braun and Clark, p.4, bold text in original). Typically, it is characterised as inductive rather than deductive, and as drawing cautious inferences about the general from close attention to the particular (Gomm, 2009; Braun and Clark; Silverman, 2013). Furthermore, qualitative researchers

recognise that they themselves inevitably shape the research process with their own perspectives and starting points, and that self-awareness about the impact of this is important for good-quality qualitative research (Denscombe, 2010; D'Cruz and Jones). Beyond these broad commonalities, however, the qualitative umbrella covers a range of methodologies, and so I had to make further decisions. These required that I strike a balance between consistency and adaptability. On the one hand, locating the study sufficiently firmly within an overarching approach would facilitate clarity and internal coherence. On the other, it was important to avoid 'methodolatry – a preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the story being told' (Janesick, 1994, p.215).

In determining my approach to the study it was necessary first to identify the assumptions that underpinned it about the social world, and about how knowledge of that world can be obtained. Social research methodologists generally distinguish between ontological and epistemological assumptions that focus on existence and knowledge respectively (for example Braun and Clarke, 2013; Punch, 2014; Bhaskar, 2017). Braun and Clarke conceptualise ontological positions as on a continuum between realists' acceptance of a reality independent from human understanding, and relativists' claims that the latter gives rise to the former. My own position sits between the two and is identified as critical realism, which holds that while a mind-independent reality exists, our grasp of it is inevitably filtered through individual perceptions (Oliver, 2012). Critical realism originates in Bhaskar's philosophy of science developed in the 1970s (Bhaskar and Lawson, 1998). Bhaskar articulates a tripartite ontology comprising overlapping domains of the real, the actual and the

empirical. These work together to make up our experience of the world: real 'universal generative mechanisms', of which we may or not be aware, lead to actual events, which we interpret empirically (Hawke, 2017, p. xx). Critical realism thus recognises that both experience and meaning affect people's lives, for example that homelessness involves both being cold and wet in the rain and also having a sense of what it is to have a home (Bhaskar, 2017). Advocates for critical realism argue that it offers a sound basis for social work research in three ways. First, it provides a practical, rather than inflexibly purist, approach to knowledge (Houston, 2001; Anastas, 2012). Second, its acceptance of an objective truth, albeit one we cannot fully apprehend, prevents a slide towards a position of relativity that compromises social justice (Pease, 2010). Finally, its recognition of social mechanisms as real fits well with research concerned with the impact of these on people's lives (Houston, 2010; Oliver). These features of critical realism mean that it provides a basis for my study that is both usefully pragmatic and also maintains a position consistent with my personal and professional value base. In the context of research, important to me with regard to these values was respect for participants as equals rather than in the 'subordinate position' implied by research approaches that favour objectivity and researcher detachment (Punch, 2014, p. 148). In this regard, my approach also reflects feminist research principles of respect for participants and recognition of researcher subjectivity (Letherby, 2003; Willig, 2013).

If social reality is accessible only through individuals' perceptions, then it follows that knowledge about it will derive from investigations of those perceptions and the meanings people ascribe to them (Gomm, 2009). This means that a critical realist

ontology leads logically to an interpretivist epistemology. Crotty (1998, p.67, italics in original) argues that while often regarded as emerging from Weber's concept of '*Verstehen*, understanding', interpretivism has longer and wider roots, in debates about whether the social and natural sciences require different sorts of research. Interpretivism embraces a range of qualitative approaches that aim to elucidate 'the meaning that events and situations have for the people who experience them' (Gomm, 2009, p. 178). This meant that having clarified the underpinning assumptions on which my research was based, it remained necessary to identify a specific approach that could enable me to meet my objectives. A number of qualitative methodologies were clearly unsuited to the study from the outset. Discourse approaches, for example, focus on how research participants use language to construct their social reality (Willig, 2013), and ethnography on the culture of groups (Creswell, 2013). While both might offer useful insights into ethics in social work education they would not answer my specific research question, with its principle concern not ethical discourse or ethical culture but participants' understandings of ethics itself. I considered two approaches in greater depth. The first was narrative research. With its origins in the same 'turn to language' in the 1980s that underpin discourse approaches, narrative research encompasses a range of methodologies that emphasise the role of story-telling in human sense-making (Murray, 2015, p. 85). This had appeal as it resonated with my experiences as academic of the stories students told, for example at selection interviews or in tutorials, about their realisation that social work was the career path they wanted to pursue. It also echoed my practice experience of the importance for service users of narratives in making sense of difficult circumstances. On closer inspection, however,

it was evident that a narrative focus would, like discourse analysis, lack the emphasis on experience that my research question required, although I anticipated that there might be a narrative element to the data I obtained. Second, looking for an approach which offered a focus on experience, I considered one that both featured significantly in the literature review and also seemed to have a comfortable fit with social work principles and practice: grounded theory. Despite divergence between its proponents since its inception, grounded theory has nonetheless maintained its essential characteristics of generating theory inductively from data, with sampling and data collection shaped by emergent findings (Creswell, 2013). This emphasis on the data echoes a commitment to the voice of the service user in social work practice, while the dynamic relationship between analysis and the research process chimes with the practice of social work assessment. However, grounded theory's aim, although not always fully realised, is theory generation (Braun and Clarke, 2013), while in my own study I sought rather to capture understandings at a more fundamental level. This led me to turn to an approach whose primary concern is an investigation of 'the things themselves' (Husserl, 1971, p. 67): phenomenological research.

5.2.2 Phenomenological research

Phenomenological research investigates the '**lived experience** of a concept or a phenomenon' (Creswell, 2013, p.76, bold text in original). Care is needed not to over-emphasise abstract concepts in the practical task of research (Giorgi, 2008;

Silverman, 2014). However, as phenomenological research approaches derive from phenomenological theory, a study claimed as phenomenological must be demonstrably so (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Finlay, 2011). There thus follows a brief account of the phenomenological context for the methods and tools I employed. Phenomenology has roots in pre-Socratic Greek philosophy and ideas from Kant and Hegel (Moustakas, 1994; Moran and Mooney, 2002). However, its modern progenitor is widely accepted as Husserl, active in the early twentieth century (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Finlay, 2011; Käufer and Chemero, 2015). Husserl's phenomenology offered the means to acquire knowledge of the world by attending to its presentation in consciousness (Husserl, 1971). For Husserl, consciousness is not an end in itself but illuminates what it is conscious of: it is 'intentional... *about* something' (Moran and Cohen, 2012, p.170, italics in original). Although criticised for his impenetrability and decline into quasi-mysticism (Findlay, 2005; Blackburn, 2008), Husserl influenced Continental philosophers including Heidegger, Levinas, Sartre and De Beauvoir (Moran and Mooney; Moran and Cohen; Käufer and Chemero). It was Husserl's methods for illuminating the 'something' with which consciousness is concerned that led to his ideas being developed, later in the twentieth century, from theoretical philosophy to a research methodology (Creswell, 2013). For Husserl, the phenomenologist 'treats everything that is given or appears as a phenomenon' (Husserl, 1999, cited in Moran and Cohen, p. 251) rather than pre-empting what a phenomenon might be. Accordingly, phenomenological research approaches share a focus on the phenomenon under investigation as participants experience it, rather than defining in advance the sort of thing it is (Crotty, 1998; Creswell). This principle aside, the phenomenological research field is broad, with

passionate disagreements about the soundness of particular approaches (Finlay, 2009; Tomkins and Eatough, 2014). It has been delineated in different ways, but commonly suggesting a range between descriptive and interpretative emphases (Smith, Flowers and Larkin; Denscombe, 2010; Finlay, 2011). Of these, my own research question pointed to an interpretative approach. My research objectives were less to elucidate the 'essence' of ethics, which would have necessitated a descriptive phenomenology (Finlay, p.93), but more to investigate how individuals made sense of it in the process of their social work education. A scan of social work research textbooks found no reference to phenomenology in index or contents pages (Shaw *et al.* 2010; Whittaker, 2012; Alston and Bowles, 2013; D'Cruz and Jones, 2014). However, looking more widely for examples of interpretative phenomenological research to enable me to understand its principles, I found a number of studies that had employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). On closer scrutiny and on further reading IPA appeared useful for my study, being an interpretative phenomenological methodology with a focus on individual understanding. It also offered a structured analysis process, helpful for me as a novice researcher, although I was aware that this may need to be adapted in accordance with the requirements of my own research.

5.3 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

> [IPA] seeks to ascertain how social actors make sense of their experience by exploring, investigating and eliciting meaning, and by

> attempting to provide 'thick' descriptions of their perceptions. This contribution to knowledge generation marks it out as a method par excellence for qualitative inquiries into social work
>
> (Houston and Mullan-Jensen, 2012, p.268).

IPA originated in the 1990s, intended to bring the strengths of both cognitive and discursive approaches to health psychology (Smith, 1996). Subsequently, its psychological exponents have argued that it reconnects with their discipline's early qualitative concerns, which they describe as having been overshadowed by quantitative emphases in the early twentieth century (Ashworth, 2015; Smith and Osborn, 2008; Finlay, 2011). Since its inception, as well as being used in health psychology (for example Irvine *et al.* 2009; Ison and Kent, 2010; Arroll and Howard, 2013), IPA has gained popularity across related fields (Houston and Mullan-Jensen, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2013). These include higher educational pedagogy, where researchers have used it to investigate medical students' understanding of geriatrics (Bagri and Tiberius, 2010), nursing students' leadership skills (Pepin *et al.* 2011), and trainee counsellors' experience of listening (Lee and Prior, 2012). In all these examples, IPA elucidates how participants make sense of particular aspects of their educational experience, suggesting its suitability for my own study. IPA is not unaffected by debates about what constitutes good phenomenological research: Giorgi (2011, p.212) argues that it is marked by numerous 'laxities' and neither properly phenomenological nor adequately interpretative. However, as applied in the examples mentioned above and presented by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.1) in their 'comprehensive guide', IPA appeared to offer practicable means to conduct my study, consistent with my objectives and underpinning philosophy. I

drew upon this guidance in designing and executing the project, while remaining mindful that further choices would be necessary based on the research question and pragmatic considerations.

The three defining characteristics of IPA are that it is phenomenological, interpretative, and maintains a discernible focus on individual participants and the detail of their experiences as they present them (Smith, 2011a). I shall address these in turn.

5.3.1 IPA and phenomenology

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) note four phenomenological philosophers as especially relevant for IPA: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. First, central to IPA is Husserl's assertion that a phenomenon cannot be investigated separately from the consciousness by which it is experienced (Husserl, 1971). This is tempered by Heidegger's concept of human existence as 'Dasein…Being–in-the-world', with the corollary that consciousness is inevitably situated (Heidegger, 2010, p.53). Hence, IPA is consistent with a critical realist ontology (Robinson and Smith, 2010), which as noted above underpins my study. Sartre's philosophy adds the perspective that we are constantly becoming ourselves in the presence, or significant absence, of others (Sartre, 1969). This is especially pertinent for the study given the evolving process of professional identity formation that had led me to consider a narrative approach. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology emphasises that human understanding cannot be separated from our physical embodiment, which inevitably

shapes our experience of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). At the outset of my study, Merleau-Ponty's contribution seemed the least obviously relevant of the four phenomenologists'. Reflecting IPA's health psychology origins, where changing or problematic experiences of the body are central (Finlay, 2011; Smith, 2011a), it appeared to offer less to my own investigation into ethics. However, it became clear in my interviews and data analysis that participants' experiences were not without a physical dimension, with ethics involving feeling, moving and doing.

5.3.2 IPA and interpretation

An individual's account of their experience is not the same as the experience itself. Accepting this premise, IPA is explicitly interpretative, drawing on the hermeneutic tradition to engage with how participants make sense of their experiences and how the researcher in turn makes sense of what the participant communicates. With its roots in the exegesis of ancient or sacred texts (Gomm, 2009), hermeneutics incorporates ideas from Schleiermacher, Ricœur and Gadamer (Smith, Flowers and Larkin). Writing in the early nineteenth century, Schleiermacher asserted that close engagement with a text could provide the reader with a closer understanding than that of the author his or herself (Schleiermacher, 1998). In IPA, this engagement comprises a process whereby the researcher tries 'to make sense of the participant making sense of x' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, p.187). It requires a simultaneously empathic and questioning position, reflecting Ricœur's differentiation between 'two

interpretations of interpretation' (Ricœur, 1970, p.32). For me, this stance felt a familiar and comfortable one, echoing social work practice where compassion sits alongside professional inquisitiveness. Gadamer (2012) cautions that interpretation is situated. He suggests as an example (p. xxix) that a 1960s history of 'Eskimo tribes', read fifty years later, would not only appear factually limited but also reflect the preoccupations of its era. This neatly demonstrates its own point: in 2017, 'Eskimo' itself sounds an outdated and possibly offensive term. Emphasising the importance of continual self-awareness in the data analysis process, Gadamer echoes Heidegger's concept, noted above, of the inescapable impact of our own position on our knowledge. This is again consistent with a critical realist position. Behind the words people use lies 'something' – 'something thematic and psychological which reflects the essence of a person or experience' (Tomkins and Eatough, 2014, p.7). However, our understanding of that 'something' is inescapably tempered first by the [participant's] language used to describe it and then by the [researcher's] response to those words. This reflects IPA's 'double hermeneutic': 'the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, p.3).

5.3.3 IPA and the particular

Finally, IPA is characterised by idiography: 'a commitment to the particular'. This includes commitment to specific participants, experiences and details (Smith,

Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.29) and at the analysis stage a recognition that individual words or short passages may be 'gems' whose 'analytic leverage' offers particular insight into the phenomenon (Smith, 2011b, p.7). This has a sound fit with my study's objectives, as well as with an ethical position that values participants as individuals (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014; Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), 2017a). However, IPA's idiographic emphasis also reflects the methodology's health psychology origins, raising questions about its applicability to my own study. In research terms, an idiopathic focus on particularities may be contrasted with nomothethic studies that seek instead to generate generalisable findings (Gomm, 2009). Thus in health psychology, IPA's idiopathic sensibility offered a counter to the research approaches dominant when it was developed (Smith, 1996). Conversely, Houston and Mullan-Jensen (2012) suggest that this very emphasis might constitute a limitation of IPA for social work research, if it means that the effects of structural factors on people's lives are neglected. This chimes with Crotty (1998), who argues that contemporary phenomenological research has tended to move away from the criticality of its underlying philosophy to a preoccupation with individual participants' subjectivity. I was mindful, therefore, that structural factors should not be neglected in the study. Consequently, while close attention to individual experience was inherent to the analysis process, which will be outlined below, structural considerations informed both the ethical and practical elements of planning and executing the fieldwork, and the data analysis. This was important as not only is social work education situated in contexts marked by dynamics of power and accountability, but also because these were mirrored in the research itself, in power differentials between myself and participants.

5.4. Methods and tools

In this part of the chapter I turn to the practical details of the study: how the data was collected, managed and analysed. In the interests of clarity the chapter is organised broadly chronologically, in the order in which I undertook the various research tasks.

5.4.1 Data collection strategy

In the early stages of my research I rather assumed, as a default position, that I would collect data by means of interviews with individual participants, perhaps because one-to-one conversations had been central in my social work practice. Becoming more familiar with research methods I reviewed other possibilities and considered employing focus groups or written pieces, but rejected both. Focus groups, while superficially attractive on the basis that students might find a peer group environment facilitative, would limit opportunities to explore individual understanding, which was the aim of my research. I was also mindful that students might want to say what they thought was 'right' in front of an academic or peers, and felt that this would be easier to ameliorate in an individual interview than in a group. Written pieces, similarly, might have intimations of formal assessment, proving a disincentive to participation and inhibiting candour. I therefore settled on individual interviews as after all providing an appropriate fit with the study's aims, allowing detailed exploration of participants' responses and thus generation of good quality data. Interviews also offered flexibility in planning and execution, important

considerations as I was managing lecturing and course co-ordination responsibilities alongside the research.

The next consideration was what type of interviews to employ. Some methodologists differentiate between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (for example, Denscombe, 2010; Punch, 2014) although Braun and Clarke (2013) caution that these categories may mislead as all interviews are structured by the researcher to some degree. Structured interviews, effectively face-to-face questionnaires (Denscombe), were clearly unsuited to my aims of obtaining insight into meaning for individuals. Furthermore, the predetermined responses they offered participants would impose my own assumptions to an extent incompatible with a phenomenological commitment to Husserl's 'things themselves' (Husserl, 2002, p.67, and see above). Conversely, unstructured and semi-structured interviews may be regarded as on a continuum, designed around broad themes or flexible open questions respectively (Braun and Clark). Both remained options, as both are equipped to elicit participant understanding and offer the scope to explore interviewees' ideas and experiences in detail (Denscombe). It remained necessary to determine what sort of interview would be appropriate for my study along the semi-structured–unstructured continuum.

5.4.2 Developing the interview guide

Finlay (2011) argues that the concept of data collection is at odds with a phenomenological approach, and that it is more accurate to think about '*generating* data within a research encounter' (Finlay, p.197, italics in original). Reflecting this, phenomenological interviewing typically tends towards the unstructured variety (Finlay; Padgett, 2008) with the interviewer initiating discussion about the phenomenon of interest and then letting the participant direct what follows. Were I to adopt this approach, I might open my interview with a single question, perhaps 'Please tell me what ethics means to you as a social work student', with further probing and exploration based on cues from the participant. While initially this was a tempting strategy, appearing both empowering for participants and potentially productive of highly nuanced data, I decided against it, for three reasons. First, I was concerned that responses in an unstructured interview might simply reproduce a list of theoretical approaches and take me no nearer to meeting my aims and objectives. Second, I wondered if, given my role as academic, a single question might put participants uncomfortably 'on the spot' and inhibit their responses. Third, I felt that predetermined questions would enable me to focus on aspects of the course most likely to be marked by ethical concerns, based on my 'insider' knowledge and the literature. Together, these considerations pointed to semi-structured interviews, based on the concept of the researcher as a 'traveller' alongside participants, rather than the more positivistic 'miner who unearths the valuable metal' (Kvale, p.19). In semi-structured interviews a schedule of questions is prepared to guide the

conversation but used flexibly, in response to issues raised by participants and to facilitate detailed exploration (Gomm, 2009; Braun and Clark, 2013). Accordingly, I drew up two interview guides of ten questions each, one for use with the Year One (Y1) sample and the other for use with the other two (see Appendix C). These were mapped against the research objectives and broadly similar, but alluded to experiences relevant to particular stages of the course. These included activities designed to prepare students for practice learning for the Y1 sample, and practice learning placements for the Year Two (Y2) and Year Three (Y3) participants. The guides were informed by an exploratory group discussion held with six (non-participant) social work students to clarify the sorts of situations in which they believed ethics were significant, and the vocabulary they used to talk about them. They were further refined in supervision and with the assistance of two student volunteers with whom I conducted pilot interviews. This exercise offered insight into where my existing questions lacked clarity or might seem to invite 'right or wrong' answers. It also provided a sense of the flow and timing of the interviews and led to an overall reduction in the number of questions, allowing instead for greater use of prompts if necessary. Students involved in both the group and individual activities gave their time voluntarily and were informed that their contributions did not constitute research data.

5.4.3 Sampling strategy

Sampling approaches differ in quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative researchers generally seek samples that are representative of a wider population, permitting inferences that can be applied beyond the study on the basis of statistical significance (Denscombe, 2010; Punch, 2014). Conversely, in a qualitative study sampling strategies tend to be 'purposive…sampling in a deliberate way, with some purpose or focus in mind' (Punch, p.161). This meant that for my study I was looking for student participants engaged in qualifying social work education and willing to talk about their understandings of ethics. In addition, IPA values homogeneity in its samples, as facilitating focus on the phenomenon being investigated (Smith and Eatough, 2016). This meant that while undergraduate or postgraduate students would meet the requirements of the study, it was preferable that all the students within a sample were on the same course. Given my employment as a social work lecturer, students within my own university, the University of Bedfordshire (UoB) were to hand, offering insider advantages including knowledge of context and ease of access and interaction (Greene, 2014). I was also aware of potential limitations, including challenges in eliciting rich data (Humphrey, 2013; Greene) and the ethical issues attendant on the involvement of participants I taught and assessed (ESRC, 2017b). Fortunately, the university then delivered its qualifying undergraduate degree social work course on two sites, and so I was able to identify students within my own institution but with whom I had no regular contact. This offered a useful compromise and pragmatic advantages. Working in the

university where my prospective participants were based, I could time my approaches and fieldwork to suit the students' calendar, with which I was familiar. Furthermore, with lecturers who taught on the site as colleagues I was optimistic about gaining access. On the other hand, the power I held as an academic – although requiring consideration - did not extend to involvement in these students' assessments, nor did I have existing personal relationships with them that might jeopardise effective and ethically acceptable data collection. I thus identified undergraduate UoB social work students, but not based on my own campus, as the intended participants for the study. This decision had implications for their likely demographic. The UoB promotes widening participation in higher education, for example by encouraging applications from candidates who may be more mature than typical undergraduates or from minority ethnic or lower socio-economic backgrounds (UoB, 2017). Its social work undergraduate intake reflects this, and where relevant, I address personal details that participants include in their interviews in my results and discussion (Chapters 6-9).

It was then necessary to determine whether and how participants' year groups would be relevant in my study. My primary focus was not participants' ethical development over time and so a longitudinal approach was not required, but a number of possibilities remained. One was to recruit a single sample, drawn from the final year cohort of the course, on the basis that these students would have the most experience of social work education to draw upon. Another was similarly to seek one sample but comprising students irrespective of year group, given that ethics is infused throughout qualifying social work education in England and the

same descriptors used across the curriculum (TCSW, 2012b, and see Chapter Two). However, qualifying social work education is a structured, progressive process. Separate year-group samples would offer opportunities to elucidate understandings at different academic levels, teasing out specific characteristics and patterns that might emerge both within and between stages. This informed my decision to recruit three samples, one from each of the three different stages of the undergraduate degree.

Further decisions were then necessary regarding sample size. In quantitative research, this is determined by the demands of statistical significance (Denscombe, 2010; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Punch, 2014). In qualitative studies, which 'elucidate the particular' (Creswell, 2013, p.157), the criteria are less clear. Braun and Clarke (p.55) note that researchers often cite seeking 'saturation' as a rationale for collecting data until no new information emerges, but argue that the term (which originated from grounded theory) is often used imprecisely. Baker and Edwards (2012, p.42), having sought the views of fifteen methodologists, conclude that rather than focusing on participant numbers, qualitative researchers should consider

> … epistemological and methodological questions about the nature and purpose of the research … the judgment of the epistemic community in which a student or researcher wishes to be or is located, is another key consideration.

Other methodological literature broadly echoes this position (for example Braun and Clarke; Creswell; Punch) and so in considering my sample size it was necessary to be mindful of the study's aim, objectives and methodology, as well as practical

constraints.

Determining the size of the individual samples to be drawn from each year group involved balancing two opposing drivers. Phenomenological research generally works with small samples, including of a single participant (Creswell, 2013). However, too few participants might generate too small an amount of data to enable me to draw useful inferences for social work education. On the other hand, IPA methodologists advise that too many transcripts can prove unmanageable at the analysis stage, and compromise the strengths of the approach (for example, Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Larkin and Thompson, 2011). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that the ideal size for an IPA sample is between three and six participants, with 12 in total as likely to generate ample data for a project of PhD scope. Bearing this in mind, I aimed for initial expressions of interest from up to ten students from each stage of the course. I anticipated that half of these at best would translate into actual participation, which would mean that I could afford to lose potential participants while still having sufficient for a meaningful study.

5.4.4 Recruitment and the participants

I decided to interview participants towards the end of the summer term, so that they had the experiences of the preceding academic year to draw upon. Reflecting the current social work curriculum (see Chapter Two) this meant that alongside academic assessments the Y1 students had completed a range of Ready for Placement activities, the Y2s a 70 day placement and the Y3s 100 days. By

negotiation with the course co-ordinator, I introduced the study to undergraduate students at each level of the course, first by email and then in a brief meeting with them when they were already attending university for other activities. At these meetings I gave a short presentation about my project and information in writing for students to take away, and sought expressions of interest that I would follow up at a later date. After consultation with the students it was agreed that this would be after they had completed their academic assignments for the year. These early approaches emphasised that participation was voluntary and outlined the purpose and nature of the study, important in meeting the requirement of phenomenological research that participants have direct experience of the phenomenon of interest (Englander, 2012). It could be argued that this could apply to all students on the course, as all had attended lectures on ethics and values and completed assessment tasks in which attention to ethics was required. Equally, in emphasising ethics in my recruitment materials I might have missed opportunities to speak with students who perceived ethics as an insignificant element of their social work education and so might offer insights from this different perspective. However, my phenomenological methodology, borne out of the research question, required explicit attention to the phenomenon under scrutiny, and so it was important that participants were aware that ethics was my focus.

The days on which I met prospective participants were complementary to the core curriculum and attendance was patchy, meaning that I spoke with no more than half of each of the three cohorts. I had contingency plans should these initial efforts fail to glean sufficient participants. However, following up early expressions of interest, I

found that with three exceptions all those students who had indicated their interest in taking part in the study were happy to proceed. By June 2014 I had secured four participants from each of years one and two and eight from year three, the latter a larger than ideal sample (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) but I hoped not unmanageably so. My fears of an unacceptable dropping off of numbers therefore proved unfounded.

Table 5: The study participants

Year of course	Name in study	Ethnicity	Age at start of course	Faith
1	Amy	White British	26	Christian
	Balikis	Black African	30	Christian
	Francesca	Black African	27	Christian
	Jane	White British	39	None
2	Linda	White British	49	None
	Mavis	Black African	38	Christian
	Pauline	Black African	40	Christian
	Sarah	White British	44	Christian
3	Annie	Black African	45	Christian
	Barbara	Black African	34	Christian
	Chloe	White British	39	None
	Grace	Black African	19	Christian
	Jess	Black African	37	Christian
	Katrina	White	21	None

		British		
	Mary	White British	23	Christian
	Teresa	Black African	29	Christian

Participants' ages varied between 19 and 49. Nine of them in total identified as Black African and seven as White British, and all were women. This simply reflected the characteristics of participants as they came forward; the sample was not designed to reflect the local or national social work student population, as statistical inferences were not intended. The absence of male participants limited opportunities for consideration of the results in relation to gender but added to the sample's homogeneity, and so was not a disadvantage from a methodological perspective. It also reflected the predominantly female international social work population noted in Chapters Three and Four, and the composition of the course that provided the sample. Nonetheless the absence of a male perspective is noted in the conclusion to the thesis (see Chapter One) where I make recommendations for further research.

5.4.5 The interviews

The qualitative methodological literature widely notes the significance of the quality of the interaction between researcher and participant in gathering useful data (for example Kvale, 2007; Roulston, 2010). Furthermore, writers on social work research note that in-depth and facilitative interviewing techniques reflect a

disciplinary commitment to social justice (for example Smith, 2009; Gilgun, 2010; D'Cruz and Jones, 2014). Reflecting these considerations, I made efforts to maximise participants' ease throughout. I had asked that interviews take place in either June or July 2014. This was so that participants were at or near the end of one academic year but had not yet engaged with the next, in order to facilitate focus on experiences of each particular level of study. Beyond that stipulation, which all participants acceded to, the choice of time was theirs, as far as I could accommodate it. Given the option to meet either at the university or at another venue of their choice, most chose their own campus, where as a member of staff I had easy access to rooms. Two preferred their placement agencies, one another university building near her home and one a quiet corner in a café. Most interviews ran without interruption, although the latter two were affected respectively by our being asked to move rooms during the interview, and the clatter of kitchen equipment. On listening to these interviews I concluded that these issues did not seem to have disrupted the conversational flow, although a learning point for me was the balance between participants' preferences and the practical requirements of the research.

I ensured that I arrived early for each interview so had time to arrange the space, positioning furniture to maximise comfortable interaction and setting out refreshments. While waiting for participants to arrive I made brief journal notes of my own thoughts and feelings, both to capture and contain these ahead of the interviews and as a tool to help me re-engage with the event later on. When each participant arrived I collected basic demographic details and we completed consent

forms, which for familiarisation purposes, I had sent to participants in advance (see Appendix D). I also gave them the opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns ahead of the interview or when we met, although none did. Each participant was also invited to choose a pseudonym that they would like me to use for her in the study, although most left this decision to me. I chose names that, as far as I was aware, had no particular resonance for me which might cloud my response to the data at the analysis stage. Before each interview started I reiterated for each participant what I had already told them, both verbally and in writing, about there being no right or wrong answers as my interest was in their own thoughts and experiences. This was important to revisit given our respective roles of academic and student, which I will discuss further below in addressing research ethics. These early 'housekeeping' interactions were helpful in starting to build rapport and trust, which facilitate fruitful discussion (Denscombe, 2010; King and Horrocks, 2010). This process continued with the first question, which asked participants about what had initially drawn them to social work. Relevant for the study, this also served as a useful icebreaker as students are asked about this at selection interviews, so it was reasonable to assume would have responses to hand. As each interview progressed I was able to draw upon interpersonal skills developed as a social work practitioner and academic, to enlarge and clarify participants' responses. Having memorised the interview guide, prompts and probes, I was able to employ these flexibly. I was also able to attend closely to participants as they spoke, with writing limited to the occasional jotting down of topics I wanted to revisit later in the interview. The duration of the interviews varied between 45 and 91 minutes, the average being 68. Immediately after each interview I made further journal notes of any striking non-

verbal factors and overall impressions, again to facilitate re-engagement when reviewing the transcriptions.

5.4.6 Recording, transcription and tools

IPA focuses on the verbal content of interviews and so audio recordings were sufficient for my purpose. Participants were informed that were they not willing to be recorded I would take written notes instead, but none opted for this. Two digital recording devices were used in case of equipment malfunction.

When first planning the interviews I had assumed that I would transcribe them myself, but was then offered funds from within the university to support transcription by a professional service. While initially hesitant, aware that transcription facilitated familiarity with the data (Kvale, 2007), I concluded that outsourcing it would save valuable time. Moreover, I knew that I would in any event review the transcriptions myself, alongside the audio recordings, to ensure accuracy. This revealed few inaccuracies or omissions beyond occasional inaudible phrases, which I was usually able to decipher with repeated listening. I was also able on occasion to note instances where I felt that the transcriber's punctuation did not most effectively convey the participant's intonation. I was aware, nonetheless, of the inevitable subjectivity of judgments about any account or record of another person's words or experiences – a transcription is 'not a facsimile, it's a representation' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.163. Accordingly, I kept amendments to the minimum.

Initially I was disinclined to use computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS), aware of arguments that it removed the researcher from the material (Spencer *et al.* 2015) and reluctant to devote precious time to software training. Learning more, however, I recognised that CAQDAS permitted both close engagement with the data and also analytic coherence, provided it was used selectively and appropriately to the study and its methodology (Silver and Lewins, 2014). Before making a final decision I began the first few analyses of individual transcripts using paper and coloured pens, to familiarise myself with IPA in practice and equip me to evaluate the suitability of various software products. Having done this I briefly scrutinised a number of CAQDAS packages online and attended training in two, Atlas and NVivo. At the end of this exploratory process I concluded that NVivo both offered a sound fit with IPA and allowed greater ease and transparency than pen and paper. In particular, it facilitated the dynamic process of moving between the themes being developed and the data itself, so that claims made remained grounded in participants' words and in the context in which they were spoken. It also enabled me to link memos, notes written 'to record and develop' ideas related to the research (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.332), to relevant data, which also aided clarity when I came to write up the study's results. These memos included those that captured my first impressions of participants, others that recorded ideas underpinning the development of themes, and finally reflections about the analytic process. Other packages offered similar tools to NVivo, but I found it the most personally accessible and suited to my research approach. Equally, on a pragmatic level it appeared the most stable in use on my home computer, with technical

support from the university readily available in case of any difficulty. This was not to say that having committed to using NVivo I abandoned pen and paper altogether. While I found NVivo ideal for analysing individual transcripts, when looking for broader patterns across cases I found slips of paper on a table, or on a wall, offered more flexibility than manœuvring an alphabetical list on a screen, so then used hard copy again.

5.4.7 The analysis

Table 6: Stages of analysis in IPA

Step	Activity
1	Reading and re-reading
2	Initial noting
3	Developing emergent themes
4	Searching for connections across emergent themes
5	Moving to the next case
6	Looking for patterns across cases

Adapted from Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, pp. 82-101

IPA is distinguished not by rigid adherence to a standardised process but its focus on participants' sense-making, approached via the researcher's interpretation (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Smith and Eatough, 2016). However, as a novice researcher I broadly followed the six-step process of analysis detailed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (summarised above). Consistent with the decision to recruit three separate samples to capture experiences at the first, second and third years of the course, I undertook analysis of each sample discretely. This meant that I first analysed each transcript per sample in turn, following *Steps 1–4*, before repeating

the process with the next transcript at *Step 5*. Only at the sixth step did I develop patterns of meaning across the sample. This enabled a rigorous, transparent and consistent approach to the data, although as I will show, the process was not such a linear one as the model in summary might suggest.

Step 1: Reading and re-reading

Smith, Flowers and Larkin suggest that this step begins with reading the transcript repeatedly, to aid familiarisation, and noting any initial dominant impressions to facilitate their being set aside ahead of close engagement with the data. To do this I first listened to each interview without looking at the text, which I found helpful in enabling me to focus on tone and patterns of expression. Revisiting the notes I had taken at the time of each interview helped re-orient me further in my experience of the participant and my feelings and impressions at the time. I captured this step of analysis in a short reflective memo, writing briefly and avoiding pre-emptive statements that might close down subsequent analysis. Undertaking these pieces of writing proved useful in two ways. First, it helped me to contain possibly intrusive impressions that may have clouded the analysis process. For example, when first listening again to Sarah I was struck by her accent, which I could not place and which had at times distracted me during the interview. Simply noting this served to mitigate its impact. Second, it began the process of my questioning the basis for my own responses, essential as the analysis went forward and reflecting the 'double hermeneutic' of my own sense-making alongside participants', noted above. For example, having noted my early impression of Jane as 'down to earth' I was able to unpick this as perhaps deriving both from her Yorkshire origins and at times simple,

even simplistic language. So, had I imposed on Jane a clichéd understanding of Yorkshire people as 'straight talking'? Why did she choose at times to voice complex and troubling concepts in terms I perceived as childlike? – and why did I regard them as such? At this stage in raising questions such as these as I was not seeking answers, even were they achievable, but simply posing them reflected and facilitated a stance of curiosity and a helpful frame of mind for the analysis. I was not only familiarising myself again with the interview but getting closer to 'the 'phenomenological attitude' whereby assumptions are 'temporarily suspended (or at least reined in)' (Finlay, 2011, p.23).

Step 2: Initial noting

This step comprised scrutinising the transcript line by line, making notes of anything 'significant and of interest' (Smith and Eatough 2016, p.59). I used the annotations tool in NVivo for this (see Appendix E). At this stage I found that playing the recording of the interview alongside, on a low volume, helped me maintain a focus on the participant and what she said. I could hear the sound of her voice and the rhythm of our conversation as I worked, although my attention was now on the detail of the written word.

This purpose of this stage was to expand the transcript with impressions and possible meaning. It exemplified IPA's commitment to the hermeneutics of both empathy and suspicion, as I found myself wanting to understand what the participant was saying at the level of content, while questioning deeper or implicit meaning and noting contradictions across the interview as a whole. Flowers and

Larkin suggest annotating from descriptive, linguistic and conceptual perspectives. I found this helpful as it tempered my eagerness to rush to interpretation by maintaining a firm grounding in the analysis in what the participant was actually saying, and the language they used. Although I worked through each transcript from start to finish, this was essentially a circular rather than linear process as later parts of interviews threw new light on earlier sections, and ideas or images were repeated. I found myself moving backwards and forwards in the transcript, adding comments and revisiting sections whose meaning was illuminated by what was to come.

Step 3: Developing emergent themes

Willig (2012) notes that despite the importance of themes in qualitative research the term is often used without clarification. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2013, p.225) argue that the notion that themes 'emerge' is flawed as it misrepresents the essentially creative process of theme development, which they describe as more like sculpture than archaeology. In IPA, the process comprises a 'synergistic process of description and interpretation' bringing together the sense made by both participant and researcher such that emergent themes 'feel like they have captured…an understanding' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.92). The intention is that themes should encapsulate both what the participant had to say and its significance in the context of the research question: what 'matters' and what it 'means' (Larkin and Thompson 2011, p.105).

I began developing themes by going through the transcript chronologically. At this stage I typically generated between one and two hundred per participant, with their

names tentative, provisional and often repetitive. Refinement involved movement back-and-forth between the themes themselves, annotations, transcripts and my own thoughts; by these means themes were variously renamed, reconfigured and amalgamated. An important decision here was what to do with themes that seemed to have little obvious relevance for the research question. Braun and Clarke (p.230) note that qualitative analysis is a selective process, and that 'candidate themes' may be discarded as the process moved forward. Similarly, emergent themes may be discarded in IPA dependent on the research question and scope (Smith, Flowers and Larkin; Smith and Eatough, 2016). My own approach was cautious. I had described my study to participants as being about ethics and values, and designed questions intended to elicit responses accordingly. Given this, it seemed reasonable to regard all the emergent themes generated from these conversations, developed in turn from annotations of points of interest in the transcripts, as potentially relevant. Where a theme's significance appeared unclear, my practice was to return to the transcripts and consider whether it could be more usefully named, or its supporting extracts reallocated elsewhere. The final stage of this step was to return to each theme and scrutinise all its linked data excerpts, which led to further refinement to ensure that each remained firmly grounded in participants' words. I was left with around a dozen emergent themes for each participant (see Appendix F), each accompanied by supporting extracts.

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes

At this step, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe emergent themes being clustered together into super-ordinate themes for each participant. However, they

advocate too that researchers apply their guidance flexibly. As I knew that I would be bringing individual participants' analyses together in *Step 6,* I wondered whether it would be preferable to leave the development of super-ordinate themes until this later stage, thus carrying forward finer-grained representation of individual cases. To inform my decision, I undertook parallel analysis processes with the Year 2 sample and compared the outcomes. Based on this exercise, I concluded that leaving super-ordinate theme development until the group analysis stage was preferable. The group super-ordinate themes developed were very similar in both cases. However, the latter method allowed for greater nuance and creativity as it meant that group super-ordinate themes were derived not from super-ordinate themes but from emergent themes, less abstract and closer to transcript data. Therefore my analysis of each individual transcript concluded at *Step 3*, with each group theme (see Appendix G) linked to its relevant transcript extracts.

Step 5: Moving to the next case

Having completed the individual transcript analysis I then turned to the next in the sample and repeated the process. In achieving close attention to each participant the early stages of *Step 1* again proved helpful. Listening to the new voice, and while recognising that my own understanding was inevitably shifting as it was shaped by the previous analysis, I immersed myself afresh in the individual interview that was now my focus.

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases

Smith, Flowers and Larkin describe this final step as potentially the most creative stage of IPA, establishing connections across cases and producing a table or figure showing higher order super-ordinate themes for the sample. Beginning with the Y1 sample, I first brought together the emergent themes for the four individual participants in a further process of review, amalgamation and refinement. This generated 11 emergent themes. I them refined these emergent themes further, aiming for a sufficiently high level of abstraction to encompass the range represented by individuals, true to IPA's idiographic commitment. Once satisfied with these more abstracted expressions of meaning I designated them group themes and clustered them in turn in overarching super-ordinate themes. On completion of the analysis of the Y1 data I had two super-ordinate themes. Each comprised two themes drawn in turn from the emergent themes, and was supported by transcript extracts representing the range of meaning they incorporated. I then repeated this process for the Y2 and Y3 samples.

In the Y1 and Y2 analyses, each group theme had supporting extracts from each of the four participants. At Y3, four group themes reflected this pattern but two did not, being evidenced by extracts drawn from five and six participants respectively. Three participants were represented in both of these group themes. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that for a group theme to be regarded as such, it should be present for at least half the participants where a sample includes six or more. Participant representation in the group themes in my study meets this expectation

throughout. The table below summarises the analysis outcomes for all three samples.

Table 7: Analysis summary with emergent, group and super-ordinate themes

Participant sample	Emergent themes	Group themes	Super-ordinate themes
Year 1	11	4	2
Year 2	10	4	2
Year 3	12	6	3

The naming of group themes was an important consideration. On the one hand, I wanted the names to capture accurately the range of meaning each encompassed. On the other, I was aware that the names were my own construction and might detract from IPA's inductive flavour. Accordingly, I gave each group theme a final name that comprised my own word or words accompanied by a direct quotation from a participant, taken from one of the data extracts supporting the theme. Finally, I constructed a table of super-ordinate themes and group themes for each sample. These are included in each of the following three chapters, where they provide the basis for the discussion of the results.

This step concluded my analysis process. My intention, reflecting my rationale for seeking three samples made of students from each of the three stages of the course, was to focus on each of the year group samples individually. This meant that I did not conduct a stage of analysis of all three samples together. However, I consider them as a whole in the discussion of the results (Chapter Nine) in order to explore their significance in the context of the staged process of qualifying social work

education (see Chapter Two).

5.5. Research ethics

Punch (2014) notes that the ethics of social research with human participants are informed by principles of autonomy, confidentiality and beneficence. Reflecting this, I was aware of the importance of demonstrating respect for participants as individuals with the right to choose whether and how to take part in the study, giving careful consideration to confidentiality, and being mindful of participants' welfare. ESRC (2017b) notes that research carried out within a context of inequality needs particular ethical attention. In this case, although the intended participants were not students with whom I routinely had contact, they were studying social work at the university at which I taught and so considerations of power differentials applied. These were reflected in my application for ethical approval for the study, which was confirmed by the University of Bedfordshire in March 2014 (see Appendix H). I addressed particular issues as follows.

5.5.1 Informed consent

The importance of securing participants' properly informed consent is a guiding tenet of most social research (Gomm, 2009; Punch). In this study, a particular challenge was how to ensure that potential participants were fully aware that their consent could be withheld, or withdrawn, with no disadvantage to themselves or

implications for their course. This was made explicit in initial introductory emails, the presentations I gave prospective participants and the consent sheets signed at interview. These consent sheets were sent to participants for them to read at their leisure in advance, and revisited when we met to ensure that participants were aware that they were under no pressure to take part. Throughout the recruitment process I formed no impression of prospective participants feeling under any obligation to take part in the research. Indeed, when invited to leave a session if they did not want to hear about my study a number of students did so, which while disappointing was also reassuring as it suggested that those who remained were doing so by choice. It was also important that the information provided for participants made clear that the research would potentially be captured not only in the thesis but also in future publications and presentations. None voiced any disquiet about this.

5.5.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Braun and Clarke (2013) note that offering and maintaining anonymity and confidentiality can present challenges in practice. Regarding the former, participants were given or chose their own pseudonyms. I informed participants that their names would be anonymised in PhD supervision and not shared with academic staff who taught or assessed them unless in exceptional circumstances (detailed below). However, I told them too that interview extracts might be included in the thesis together with personal details such as gender and age if I deemed them relevant. At

interview, participants were asked not to use real names for colleagues, fellow students or service users and all complied; this was familiar practice to them, as social work students are routinely required to anonymise work they submit to the university. Several participants mentioned their own name, often in relating examples of what they 'said to themselves' in challenging situations. I removed these, and replaced them with the appropriate pseudonym, when I reviewed each transcript prior to analysis. Recordings, transcripts and participant details were stored on password-protected computers and drives, and consent documents in a locked cabinet. The transcription service I used was bound by a non-disclosure agreement and provided secure, password-protected facilities for uploading my interview recordings and returning transcripts. Participants were assured that I would delete or destroy recordings, transcriptions and any related documents 24 months after successful completion of my PhD study.

Consent documents included not only assurances of confidentiality and anonymity but also their limits. In the interests of transparency and fairness, participants were made aware that confidentiality might be breached in situations of risk or harm to others, or to themselves. I informed them that in such circumstances I would encourage them to participate in disclosure unless inappropriate but should they choose not to do so would act myself, in accordance with my obligations as an ethical researcher and a registered social worker (ESRC, 2017a; HCPC, 2017b). These provisos were not questioned by any participant, perhaps as they echoed the professional expectations regarding confidentiality explained to social work students

at the University of Bedfordshire from the outset of their course. In the event no such disclosures, with or without participant involvement, proved necessary.

5.5.3 Support for participants

I did not anticipate that the interviews were any more likely to distress participants than the reflective discussions and tasks with which they were routinely asked to engage as part of their course. Nevertheless, although ethics is not amongst the examples of 'sensitive' topics noted by ESRC (2017b), any discussion touching on identity, beliefs and intended career might be perceived as such by participants. Proactive care for them included giving assurances that they could withdraw from an interview at any time, or choose not to answer a particular question, should they wish to. I also provided information about sources of support, separate from myself, should they require it. During interviews, on a couple of occasions participants became tearful and I offered time out or cessation of the interview, but both declined.

5.5.4 Ethical challenges

Ethical research is not simply based on adherence to commitments made at the beginning of a study. Rather, having met the requirements of institutional ethical

approval the researcher must then remain ethically aware throughout the research process as it unfolds (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). The importance of this was borne out by my own experiences, both generally and with regard to particular participants, in three ways. First, although my initial ethical approval application had stated that participants would not be offered any material inducements to take part in my study, I found myself wanting to express my thanks to them for giving their time. This proved an interesting learning point. On the one hand, it seemed that in my eagerness to ensure that participants were taking part freely, especially given my insider status, I had underestimated the gratitude I would feel for them. On the other, I wondered if I was uncomfortable at being beholden, which might raise doubts about my commitment in practice to principles of partnership. In the event, I decided that a small book token, given after each interview, would be an appropriate marker of thanks. The second challenge emerged after the interviews, when I encountered two participants unexpectedly in the context of various university activities. On both occasions I contacted the student giving her the opportunity to withdraw from the study, which neither took up. Third, two participants gave me information about themselves in informal conversations after their interviews that might have proved relevant to include in the analysis. In both situations it was clear to me that it would be unethical to do so, as participants had been informed that the demographic information they gave me, and the interviews themselves, constituted the only data I would use in the research. In each case managing this knowledge required both a technical and an ethical response. The former comprised writing a short memo to contain, and assist me to set aside, the information. The latter was a continuing commitment throughout the analysis to check where I wrote about these

participants that I was not allowing my further knowledge to seep into my interpretation.

Other challenges were less discrete, but inherent to aspects of the research process as it moved forward. In the interviews themselves, I was mindful that I wanted to ensure that I gave participants time to express what they intended. This meant that asking follow-up questions to clarify responses was important not only in terms of gathering information, but as a mark of respect. At the analysis stage, it was important that what I drew from the data was clearly grounded in it, not only to indicate quality but reflecting an ethical obligation that what participants had given me was not misused. Maintaining this ethical standard was assisted by the rigour inherent in IPA and facilitated further by NVivo. It included frequent checking what I wrote against transcripts themselves, and ensuring that participants' words were not taken out of context. In some qualitative research, participants are asked to comment on the accuracy of results as a marker of credibility (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.282). This is not generally recommended in IPA, as participants' comments may contradict what was true for them in the interview and reflect how they feel they should have presented themselves (Finlay, 2011). However, in the interests of reciprocity I invited participants to an informal session when I would report results in progress, although just two attended. No further data for analysis were collected at this event. Finally, as I started to draft chapters of the thesis, I became increasingly aware of the ethical dimension of writing – Adams' (2008, p.175) 'narrative privilege' that determines how a story is told, and by whom. These considerations also reflect the phenomenological philosophy underpinning the study. The interpretative

phenomenologist researcher Van Manen (2002) argues that the act of writing up a study is an act of destruction as well as creation, as deciding what to include inevitably means omitting – and thereby rendering invisible – other ideas and perspectives. Hence 'the [phenomenological] writer desires to capture meaning in words. But the words…destroy the things that they are meant to bring into presence' (Van Manen, p.244). This meant that I was aware that in choosing the words I used to capture my results I was choosing not to use others, that would have conveyed different shades of meaning to my readers. One antidote to this concern was my confidence that my analysis had maintained closeness to the data, and the data as situated within the interviews, at every stage. Another was to stay true to IPA's idiopathic commitment by ensuring that all participants' voices were included in my account of my results. This meant that writing the results, like the analysis process which gave rise to them, was a process marked by respect for participants, demonstrated to close attention to what they had had to say.

5.6 The quality of the study

Quality measures for qualitative research have evolved from a translation of quantitative standards into expectations more explicitly aligned to qualitative objectives (Padgett, 2008; D'Cruz and Jones, 2014). Creswell (2013) illustrates this in an overview of perspectives on qualitative research validity over a period of thirty years, from the 1980s. This shows them evolving from the use of simple quantitative/qualitative equivalences to the coining of new terminology, for example

with validity coming to be conceptualised as a crystal, reflecting and refracting a range of perspectives. This highlights that quality considerations change over time: what is found satisfactory today may seem lacking in the future. Nonetheless, quality was important for me to think about as a novice researcher needing to demonstrate acceptable proficiency, and the literature review had shown that where quality was lacking or unclear, a study's knowledge claims were compromised. Creswell concludes from his account that qualitative researchers commonly employ eight validation strategies, and advises that any study should demonstrate at least two. Not all are relevant for all methodologies. For example, neither Creswell's 'persistent observation', nor 'member checking' (p.251–252) would apply to a study using IPA. However, others are relevant and are detailed elsewhere in this thesis – the clarification of my personal starting point in Chapter One, and the detailed description of themes supported by a range of evidence in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. In addition to these generic considerations, different qualitative approaches have their own markers of quality. Smith (2011a), having reviewed nearly three hundred papers published between 1996 and 2008 reporting studies that used IPA, identified six overlapping indicators of good quality work. The table below summarises both what these are and how they have been taken into account in the completion of this study.

Table 8: The quality of the study

Smith's quality criteria for research using IPA	How addressed in the study
The paper should have a clear focus	Initial broad focus on ethics in social work education refined in the literature review, and maintained throughout the thesis
The paper will have strong	Care given to the interview guide, prompts

data, resulting from careful attention to the interview process	and probes. Interviews designed to put participants at ease and elicit detailed data.
The paper should be rigorous, showing prevalence of each theme across a sample	Participant representation in group themes is noted in results chapters, and extracts from all participants are included
Sufficient space must be given to the elaboration of each theme	Group themes are each presented with supporting transcript extracts in the results chapters
The analysis must be interpretative, not just descriptive	Interpretation accompanies transcript extracts in the results chapters
The analysis should point to both convergence and divergence	Similarity and uniqueness of participants' contribution to each group theme is represented in the results chapters

Quality criteria adapted from Smith 2011a, p.24.

5.6.1 The role of reflexivity

The methodological literature widely notes reflexivity as a marker of research quality, with reflexivity broadly meaning the researcher's awareness of his or her own impact on the research process (for example Padgett, 2008; Braun and Clarke, 2013; D'Cruz and Jones, 2014; Yardley, 2015). In addition, the growing emphasis on research-mindedness in social work (D'Cruz and Jones) has been accompanied by the articulation of disciplinary expectations of reflexivity alongside ethical awareness (for example Hugman, 2010a; Dodd and Epstein, 2012). However**,** when Gringeri *et al.* (2013) reviewed a sample of 100 social work articles published between 2008 and 2010, they found reflexivity evident in only 16 per cent. This does not necessarily mean that it was absent from the research itself, but nevertheless in my own work and in the interests of transparency I wanted to ensure that I thought from the

outset about my own relationship to and impact on the study, and captured further reflections as the research process unfolded.

Reflexivity is conceptualised differently in different methodological approaches. In a grounded theory study 'theoretical sensitivity' includes the researcher's personal and professional starting point, important to identify at the start of a study and as it progresses (Birks and Mills, 2010, p.59). Conversely, in a descriptive phenomenological study the researcher is required to 'bracket' existing understandings aside to facilitate close engagement with the phenomenon (Finlay, 2011, p.97). In IPA, the emphasis on the researcher's as well as the participant's understandings means that bracketing is not regarded as fully achievable. Rather, it is important for the researcher to recognise and manage their personal perspective throughout the research process (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This was inherent in the process of analysis, as at each stage I captured thoughts and impressions in memos (as noted above, and see Appendix I). In addition, I used three further strategies. The first was writing about my PhD study as a whole. Initially I contained this in a journal, but this proved unsatisfactory: the journal was not always with me, or sometimes I simply wanted to jot down a word or two as an aide memoire. To remedy this I kept notes in a range of places. These included a notebook updated immediately before and after each interview, individual sheets in my Filofax for thoughts during the working week, and a notebook by my bed. Together they both enabled simple ventilation about the excitement and frustrations about the research process and captured unexpected insights or ideas that might direct reading, discussion or analysis. Putting thoughts in writing also provided a

sense of structure and control, especially helpful to me as a part-time student managing my research alongside other demands. Second, supervision, in formal meetings and occasionally via email, raised issues for attention or reconsideration. Finally, I was able to reflect in discussions with peers, both in the University and within the IPA practice community, with the latter also offering opportunities to present or discuss the study at various stages. Together these strategies facilitated continual reflection on the research, and my experience of and impact on it. However, I was aware that the very process of reflection was inherently coloured by my personal starting point and my experiences as social work student, practitioner and educator (see Chapter One). This meant that as well as reflective strategies, the rigour of the research process was essential in helping mitigate my inevitable preconceptions, of which I could not be fully aware.

This account of quality considerations in the study concludes this chapter, which has outlined the rationale, methodology and methods for the research. This context having been set, the next chapter moves on to present the product of the methods and tools employed: the results.

Chapter Six: The Year One results

This is the first of three chapters that present the results of the study, addressing each of the three year-group samples in turn. The table below provides a reminder of the details of the Y1 participants

.

Table 9: Year 1 participants

Name in study	Ethnicity	Age at start of course	Faith
Amy	White British	26	Christian
Balikis	Black African	30	Christian
Francesca	Black African	27	Christian
Jane	White British	39	None

At the time of their interviews, the Y1 participants were nearing the end of their first year of study on their undergraduate social work degree course. They had completed their academic work for the year, including foundational input on ethics, and completed a range of tasks designed to develop and assess their readiness for practice learning (see Chapter Two). These included classroom-based skills development activities and practical work observing a child and shadowing a qualified social worker.

The chapter comprises accounts of the super-ordinate themes and group themes developed in the analysis (see Chapter Five), supported with extracts from the interview transcripts. In the headings of relevant sections of the chapter, the name of each group theme – my own words followed by words from a participant – is

given in full. Subsequently, in the interests of concision, just my own words are used. In the extracts, (…) indicates that words have been omitted and [ ] any words added for clarity.

The analysis of the Year 1 data led to the development of two super-ordinate themes, each made up of two group themes capturing contributions from all four participants.

Table 10: Year 1 analysis summary

Super-ordinate themes	Group themes	Representation
Ethical orientation	Ethical affinity: 'It has something to do with who I am'	All participants
	Scoping the ethical field: 'As long as you've got those [ethical] pillars, then you should be all right'	All participants
Understanding people	Feeling for others: 'Thinking about how other people feel in situations'	All participants
	Accepting the individual: 'Everybody has different challenges'.	All participants

As the previous chapter described, I developed the group themes by a process of the refinement and abstraction of lower level, emergent themes. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) note that in writing up the results of IPA, there is wide flexibility in how the various level themes are presented. Thus it may be relevant to present emergent themes in their own right, or they may be 'redundant' as they have been absorbed into themes at a higher, more abstracted level (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, p.109). This was the case in my own study and so here, and in the following two chapters

which present the results of the Y2 and Y3 analyses, emergent themes are not presented separately. However, within the account of each group theme they comprise the different elements that show the range of meaning that the group theme includes.

6.1 Super-ordinate theme 1: Ethical orientation

This super-ordinate theme, the more preponderant of the two in the data, has a temporal, narrative and dynamic flavour. Its two constituent themes show participants looking backwards and forwards as they make sense of the ethical terrain of social work. First, in 'Ethical affinity', they locate themselves ethically in relation to the profession, while also expressing intimations of the ethical challenges that they anticipate in the future. Then, in 'Scoping the ethical field', participants relate their evolving understanding of the role and scope of ethics and values in social work practice.

6.1.1 Ethical affinity: 'It has something to do with who I am'

This theme incorporates what participants have to say about ethical compatibility between themselves and the social work profession. They talk about this largely in positive terms as they recount their choice of career, but as they look ahead to

qualified practice they identify aspects of the social work role that they anticipate they may find ethically challenging.

Participants commonly talk about their interest in becoming a social worker as something of substance. Francesca expresses this in terms of accumulation – 'a range of things came together' – while Amy, Balikis and Jane each talks about having been drawn to the profession for 'a long time'. Overall, there is a sense of personal experiences having led to a general disposition to work with people, and events having crystallised this disposition into a specific desire to become a social worker.

Asked about how they acquired their personal ethics and values, all the participants talk about the influence of their upbringing. For some, this was related to religious identity. Jane, for example, who describes herself as an atheist, says that she learned about human rights from family debates, while in Balikis' Christian household her mother 'always said 'Do unto others…''. Amy, having related her experience of being brought up in a family whose 'morals' included giving to charity, makes an explicit link between her upbringing and her intended career:

> Little things when you're a child, like saying 'please' and 'thank you', it's ingrained in you. So that's what I mean, the similarity to ethics and the values, they're meant to be like ingrained in you before you go out and be a social worker, so I think that's kind of what I mean. Do you understand what I mean?

Amy's mode of expression and tone of voice were tentative here, with a sense of her feeling her way as she spoke. Nonetheless her family's moral culture seems important to her not only in terms of specific exhortations but because they were firmly instilled, predisposing her to a career in which she understands that ethics and values are similarly 'ingrained'. Equally, all the participants recount life experiences that they regard as significant in shaping their ethical motivations. Staying first with Amy, we see life as a young parent lending insight into the experience of social exclusion:

> I had my first son when I was 17, so that was my first feeling of being a bit socially excluded, it kind of spurred me on to want to help people that are kind of socially excluded.

For Amy, personal experience generates thinking beyond the self and brings with it a drive to act. The capacity to feel for (albeit non-specific) others, based on shared experience, leads to a sense of responsibility towards them. Other perspectives articulate more explicitly the nature of the help participants want to give. Jane, who qualified as a counsellor before starting her social work course, describes having had a 'flaky' and 'chaotic' upbringing. She goes on:

> I think that's what led me down the route of something caring, I think it does for a lot of people doesn't it. Nearly all the people on my counselling course had had some sort of trauma I think, as probably most people have in general but probably slightly more than if you're on a maths degree or something. But that kind of made me think, 'well at least I'll have some empathy with (…) a chaotic lifestyle'.

Elsewhere in her interview Jane does not claim her capacity for empathy as an unmitigated advantage: describing herself repeatedly as 'sensitive', she recalls having been accused by others at different times of her life of this characteristic being excessive. For Jane her background did not incline her towards social work in particular but led her towards a 'caring' role, with her claim that 'at least' she is able to emphasise suggesting a sense of good being retrieved from bad. Indeed, she cites her capacity to empathise – 'thinking about how other people feel in situations' - as having shaped her sense of right and wrong. Francesca offers a broader perspective. Having said that she wants to work in communities and 'get people connected' she explains how this ambition relates to her childhood experience of her parents' separation, leading to her desire to help other people who may be in similar circumstances:

> There's loads of people out there who are in those situations and don't know who to ask, what questions to ask or how to make sense of it – and their misunderstanding of life and relationships then passes onto their children and their children's children and so it goes on.

Again, family experiences generate first empathy for others and then the desire to put it to use. There are different emphases here. Francesca's caring impulse extends beyond immediate service users to generations as yet unborn, while Jane's gaze appears to be more on herself, and how she is perceived by others. For both participants, past experiences inform a career choice intended to have a positive effect on the future. Furthermore, there is an additional sense from each of wanting

to bring order and meaning to others' uncertainty, perhaps generating something of value out of personal challenges.

Talking about their ethical affinity with social work in particular, rather than helping professions in general, participants cite the part played by encounters with individual social workers. There are two emphases here: what social workers do, and the kind of people they are. Balikis describes her social work ambitions as 'something to do with who I am', mentioning the Christian precepts of her childhood, as noted above. However, she talks too about being a service user herself, and having commended her social worker for support and empathy that helped set her life on a different path, goes on:

> I just said, 'you know what, I would like to become a social worker one day so that I can go on and (…) help somebody the way I have been helped', just make a difference really because I do believe that it was [the social worker], that it's because of her that I am where I am today.

Here, personal experience gives greater clarity to the existing predisposition to care for others that Balikis had already noted, with an additional intimation of her wanting to give back, in gratitude for what she was given. There is also a sense of giving to others being like throwing a pebble in a pond. Just as Francesca sees social work intervention in the present assisting generations yet to come, so Balikis' social worker was an unwitting role model. Social workers do not have to have been

professionally involved in participants' own lives to be perceived as significant. Amy describes encountering a social worker when working in a residential home:

> I remember seeing a social worker coming in to assess one of the elderly residents, and I remember seeing her talking with him and you know, her whole rapport and everything, and I spoke to her afterwards and she explained she was a social worker, and I remember thinking then ah, I'd really like to do something like that.

As for Balikis above, what is attractive for Amy about the social worker she sees is her caring and attentive intervention with the service user, with the repetition of 'I remember' underlining the significance of the lasting impression made. Jane emphasises not the professional practice she has observed or experienced, but how social workers conduct themselves personally. Talking about her childhood encounters with social workers who were a friend's parents, she says:

> There was this (…) way of allowing children to sort of be. It made me think social workers perhaps live their kindness to children and sort of maybe live and let live-ness.

Perhaps for Jane 'live and let live-ness' is something she would have liked in her own family life, which elsewhere she notes as being marked by chaos, as we have seen above, and judgmental intervention. Amy, equally, may have valued support from someone prepared to offer her the 'rapport' she possibly lacked in her life as a young mother experiencing social exclusion. Social workers may thus offer especially significant role models when perceptions of their practice chimes with personal

experience, leading an observer to want to offer others what they would have welcomed themselves.

The final element of this theme is the significance for participants of ethical issues that they speculate might challenge their affinity with social work in the future. These can be broadly divided into concerns about resources and concerns about the use of authority. Regarding resources, both optimistic and less hopeful perspectives are present. Asked to expand on the ethical challenges she envisages in work with adults, Amy draws on her care work experience of a service user with a learning disability who wanted greater independence than her residential facility allowed. Amy's perception was that decision-making in this case was simply financially driven, which 'goes against everything that you should be doing'. She goes on to say that were she the social worker allocated to this service user she would 'really find out what [the service user] really, really wants'. This may imply that for Amy at this early stage of the course, outcomes derive purely from an individual worker's practice, with hopefulness borne out of a degree of naïveté. Francesca, talking about staffing, offers a less optimistic perspective. Having shared her perception of increasingly fewer social work students in successive cohorts of the course, she goes on:

> It means when we're going into practice, that pressure's only gonna increase, I think it is an ethical problem (…) I think it's only gonna get harder so if you dwell on it it's gonna feel impossible to do the job.

Here a perceived lack of staff is identified as ethically problematic, perhaps because it carries the potential for a conflict between how Francesca might want to practice and what will prove practically feasible. Her solution, at least at this stage of the course, is simply not to dwell on the problem, suggesting that a response to ethical disquiet may be limited attention.

Social work's authority, and in particular its power to intervene in people's lives against their wishes, is the more dominant concern in this theme. Participants' positions suggest a spectrum between rejection and acceptance. At one end of the continuum, Amy talks about the 'topsy-turvy' power dynamics in her experience of a supervised contact setting and her disquiet at the lack of a 'level playing field' for its service users, concluding that she would not want to work in such a setting herself. Again there is a sense of a certain naïveté here, in particular of Amy apparently not acknowledging the very reasons which may have led to supervised contact being deemed necessary. At the other extreme, intrusion is regarded as an acceptable element of practice and based on service users' best interests. Balikis, talking about her shadowing experiences in a setting that used surveillance cameras to assess parenting skills, describes her initial reaction that this was 'unethical'. She goes on to explain how the explanation she was given changed her views:

> [service users] had no privacy really. But [the social worker] said that it's due to the CCTV camera that they can actually go to the court and say this mother is capable of looking after their children (…) I think it's, it's good that they have the CCTV camera there because social work it's always, we have to act in the best interests of our service users.

Here Balikis accedes to a rationale which provides a position which is both consistent with professional values while enabling her to 'feel better' herself. Amy's rejection and Balikis' acceptance of authority are both expressed in tones of certainty, but other views suggest a less committed stance. Jane talks about a classroom discussion, based on an adult safeguarding scenario, in which she disagreed with the majority view that family dynamics should be challenged:

> If [the relatives] were being violent to their mum, yeah, step in but if they choose to live their life in a different way than I do, I didn't see it as my business as a social worker, to start psycho-dynamic-ing these, these relatives of this woman.

However, Jane anticipates that her views may change: after her forthcoming placement experiences, she speculates, she may reach 'a stage where I don't feel … that it's not my business'. Francesca similarly looks to the future, hoping that by the end of the course she will have found a 'middle ground' between intervention and non-intervention. Meanwhile, however, for Francesca social work is 'an ethical minefield, isn't it' suggesting that there may be treacherous terrain to negotiate before the more comfortable mid-point is reached.

6.1.2 Scoping the ethical field: 'As long as you've got those pillars, then you should be all right'

Moving on from participants' experiences of their initial attraction to social work, this second theme captures the emerging meaning for them of the role and range of ethics and values in their chosen profession.

One perspective is of ethics and values as the basis for practice, with the different imagery that participants employ suggesting a range of perceptions of how much flexibility is permissible. Emphasising the scope for individuality, Francesca uses architectural metaphors in her elaboration of ethics and values as supporting 'pillars':

> If you've got those pillars, then you should be alright (…) it's like a foundation in you, you know, the house itself may look different to what the foundation is underneath.

Here, ethics and values provides a common structure upon which practice is founded but allows a personal 'house' to be constructed. By way of illustration, Francesca goes on to give an example of classroom activities where students had a variety of responses to a case study 'even though we're working from the same value base'. Another physical metaphor articulates more clearly the importance of a degree of compliance. Jane, describing ethics and values in social work as a 'vital platform', goes on:

> If I stay on that platform and disagree, that's okay, if I jump off the platform and disagree that's not okay, so it's kind of like a framework to do things from within.

There is more of a normative tone here, indicated by Jane's sense of what is and is not 'okay'. Amy, suggesting a yet more prescriptive understanding, talks about social workers being expected to 'live by' their ethics and values:

> I see the ethics and the values as kind of like the kind of bible, I suppose, for what you should be doing. When you're a social worker (…) you're meant to live by them.

Amy identifies herself as a Christian. However, she says that she adheres to her faith selectively and that it is not significant in her social work career – for example because it had taught her to 'hate gay people', a position she no longer holds. There is a sense here of social work ethics and values providing an alternative holy writ and an intrinsic part of Amy's professional self and morality. This suggests that social work may become an intimate part of personal identity, echoing Jane's impressions of social workers she had met as people who personified their values.

These examples have articulated how ethics and values govern participants' expectations of themselves. Another perspective is that having a social work identity raises expectations of ones ethical standards in others. Balikis, talking about her

experience of negotiating a child observation at a nursery, recounts giving assurances of confidentiality:

> I said 'everything will be confidential, as a social work student I'm bound by confidentiality so I wouldn't pick anything up that was not necessary'.

Balikis goes on to explain that in this case her request to be permitted to observe a child was turned down, despite her best efforts to assure the nursery staff that 'they'd got nothing to worry about'. Conclusions must be cautiously drawn here given the host of reasons that may account for a nursery not agreeing to a particular student observing a child at a particular time. However, it may be that Balikis herself set a higher, or at least different, value on the ethical standing she felt being a social work student gave her than did the people with whom she was negotiating. This raises a counterpoint to participants' understandings of social workers as good people whose characters they might wish to emulate: this positive perception of the profession may not be universally shared. Furthermore, students themselves may not necessarily experience expected social work values as an unmitigated good. Amy recounts an experience of holding back in a classroom discussion for fear of how her views might be construed: 'I didn't want to come across as being (…) racist (…) I just thought, let me just stay out of it and not get involved'. Here, awareness of the expectations of a social work student's values acts as an inhibiting factor, reducing rather than enhancing confidence in speaking out. This is, perhaps, of particular salience for Amy given her sense of ethics and values as tenets of the social work 'bible', as noted above, with a suggestion of her fearing being found ethically

wanting. Both these instances raise questions about potential effects of the close relationship claimed between being a social worker and being bound by certain values – or at least the need to interrogate the assumptions that may arise from that relationship.

Participants' understandings of what ethics and values mean for social workers are also conveyed by whether and how they differentiate these from what they understand to be their significance for other professions. One view is that professional values are held in common: Balikis suggests that social workers 'share the same values as most professionals', albeit with a degree of hesitancy that may suggest simply not knowing rather than conviction. The prevalent perspective is that social workers are more inclined than other professionals to value service users' individuality. For Francesca, this is borne out of what she construes as professional flexibility:

> I think social workers do have the leeway to work with the need of the person and put the person first …doctors and nurses are under a lot more pressure and I think it makes it more difficult for them to see the person because their job is to fix the problem whereas with social workers, the idea is we come in to help the person.

There is a tone of uncertainty here, in the repetition of 'I think' and the assertion of what the 'idea' is in social work rather than, perhaps, the reality. This may suggest that Francesca is making sense of a gulf between what she thinks is ideal and what she has seen in practice, or equally may simply, as with Balikis, reflect her lack of

experience as a first year student. Elsewhere, the differentiation is more confidently voiced. For Amy, it reflects the 'ingrained' nature of social work ethics she has noted, as discussed above; compared to this, she says, the ethics and values of care workers are simply part of their 'procedures and stuff'. Similarly, for Jane, it arises from the very characteristic in social workers that attracted her to the profession: what she perceives as their tendency to espouse, rather than merely voice, their values. She illustrates this with a personal example of an experience as a hospital inpatient. Having described hearing ward staff 'slagging me off at the nurses station' she goes on:

> I would just hope any social workers around someone who's feeling that vulnerable … aren't that mean, that would surprise me if I see that in social work, I would expect at least one of them to go, 'out of order, let's go and find out properly what's happening', you know, 'Is it just someone sat in a chair whingeing because she wants attention? If she does, maybe she really needs it' (…) Maybe that's a bit naïve and idealistic, I don't know.

The suggestion that this might be an 'idealistic' view is pertinent in the light of an example elsewhere in Jane's interview where she relates an encounter with an unfriendly and undermining social worker during her shadowing experience. There, Jane makes allowances for the social worker on the basis of her having a bad cold when they met: 'I know when you're feeling horrid, you can be a worse person'. It seems that for Jane, seeing social workers as fulfilling her expectations of them as good people matters, even when there are indications to the contrary. Echoing Amy's comment about their being 'ingrained', there is a sense that for social

workers, ethics and values are internalised, and so by implication more integral than they are for the nurses Jane talks about here. The difference is that while for Amy her biblical imagery conveys overtones of ethics and values being imposed by an external authority, for Jane they are in practitioners' own hands. Here, the religious position of the participants concerned may be relevant to consider: Amy, as we have seen, describes herself as Christian whereas Jane says in an emphatic tone that she is 'fully atheist'.

Participants also talk about ethics and values in ways that illuminate their developing understanding of their reach. Sometimes this manifests in doubts about whether what they are talking about is to do with ethics at all: both Amy and Jane wonder towards the end of their interviews if what they have had to say was 'waffle'. Elsewhere, participants talk about experiences of insight, when they first grasped the ethical significance of an aspect of practice they had not previously thought of in those terms. Amy, expanding on an example she has identified of value-based practice in an advocacy agency, says:

> They were listening to the service users (…) but whether that's ethics I don't know, or whether that's just basic kind of social work skills, um, you know, listening to the service users, um, trying to help them resolve their problems, you know, they were good at all that kind of, you know, that stuff, which was, which was really good to see, obviously empowering.

Amy's hesitant tone here suggests her uncertainty, also conveyed in her halting expression in the recording at this point; it seems that she is actively making sense of the relationship between ethics and other elements of the social work role. Conversely, Francesca talks about a 'Eureka moment' where she realises the value of effective communication, arising from her experience of attending a lecture on dementia:

> I'm not sure if this is an ethical principle, but one of the doctors was talking about dementia, he really … broke it down and made it simple (…) I thought if I could do that about benefits or whatever, and made it interesting as opposed to scary (…) when I'm working with people, I won't need to provide them with solutions 'cause they'll be providing them themselves.

Here, just as Francesca herself has been empowered by knowledge that has been clearly conveyed, so she wants to provide service users with similar advantages. However, given her earlier comments about the medical view of people being limited, perhaps her being 'not sure' here is due in part to this insight about a means of empowerment coming from a non-social work professional as well as her questioning whether clear communication is an ethical matter.

Finally in this theme, participants talk about their awareness of the significance for them of ethical responses they make in their lives beyond the course. Balikis, asked at the end of her interview if there is anything she wants to add about her experience of ethics and values while on her course, gives a detailed example of

challenging racism in her (part-time) workplace. In this incident she was the only black person in a room where staff taking a break were watching a television programme that showed a series of thefts being investigated with a lie detector. Seeing this, a colleague commented ' 'it's the black stole it […] because he's black''. Balikis first challenged this with the man himself, and when he would not apologise or retract his words took the matter to the manager, leading to his temporary suspension; she now reflects:

> I did the right thing by challenging him, even if it's not just for me, he might watch out next time when he's speaking in a mix of people 'cause you know, he's definitely gonna be cautious not to hurt someone else because I was definitely hurt (…) I would hope that next time he wouldn't say that again.

There is some ambivalence here about to what extent the colleague who was challenged will be changed by what happened (he 'might watch out'/will 'definitely' be cautious). Nonetheless Balikis is confident that what she did was 'right' – although her words suggest that she her priority may have been to avoid other individuals being 'hurt', rather than to speak out against a manifestation of structural oppression. An example from another participant concerns the opportunities for casual discrimination provided by social media. Jane recounts her reaction to unkind comments posted by neighbours about a mutual acquaintance with a mental illness - 'I was so angry, I was seething' – and the formal complaint she made to the service provider. This happened before Jane started her social work course and she goes on to say that were this to happen now she would challenge the perpetrators directly

and say: ‘you absolutely can’t do that’. Together, these instances suggest that ethical expectations for these participants extend beyond classroom and placement to their lives more broadly. Furthermore, they offer examples of ethical considerations not simply shaping participants’ own behaviour, but leading them to become more ethically sensitive and proactive in response to the conduct of others. This echoes the first theme presented here – the ethical attraction of social work as a career - but with intimations of further development. Thus, this super-ordinate theme concludes where it began, with the significance for participants of the explicitly ethical character of the profession to which they are starting to commit themselves.

6.2 Super-ordinate theme 2: Understanding people

This super-ordinate theme comprises themes developed from participants’ ethical understandings in terms of how they make sense of others, each conveying one of the two broad orientations. The first, ‘Feeling for others’, denotes participants responding from a position of closeness to other people and their feelings. The second, ‘Accepting the individual’, shows them adopting a position of respectful distance from which people’s unique qualities and differences are recognised and accepted.

6.2.1 Feeling for others: 'Thinking about how other people feel in situations'

In this theme participants talk about making sense of other people and their circumstances and needs by feeling, or trying to feel, as they do or might. The range of perspectives suggests a continuum along which different positions may be mapped. This theme has links with aspects of 'Ethical affinity' above. However, there participants' words suggested the capacity for feeling for other people was a personal characteristic, whereas here it arises in the context of contact with others.

At one end of the continuum, Jane recounts reacting to others so strongly as to feel their pain and distress herself. She presents this emotional response as clearly an ethical dimension of practice but not entirely a force for good. For example, asked how ethics and values affected her shadowing task, Jane's response was to talk about how her feelings for one of the young parents she encountered at an assessment facility led her to spend time talking with her. Reflecting back on the episode, she wonders if her feelings for the young woman may have distracted her from thinking about the possibility that she may have harmed her baby. Later in her interview, Jane relates an incident of meeting a service user whose story affected her so deeply that she hid her tears by retreating to the bathroom. Weeping as she speaks in the interview, she says 'I'm so sensitive […] maybe I shouldn't be a social worker'. Emotional closeness to others may therefore provide a spur to connection but also represent a threat to focus or the ability to engage. Jane goes on to talk about her capacity to feel as helping her understand ' …what life is like if you have a

disability or if you're an ethnic minority or a different skin colour or language than most people in your society'. While Jane acknowledges the limits to this emotional imagination – 'how do you get out of your own frame of reference? I find it impossible' - it nonetheless provides 'a place to start off from that's hopefully fair'. From this perspective, feeling for others is an important tool underpinning ethically-informed practice, enabling Jane to feel her way into other people's lives. As her example of hiding her tears shows, however, this process may paradoxically lead her physically away from others, with her focus not on their needs but on her own discomfort. In addition, her emphasis is on other people's individual experiences of being different from the majority, rather than the power dynamics constructions of difference may reflect.

A more purely functional perspective on feeling for others is as a means to promote understanding and partnership. Instances of this show participants drawing on their own experiences to make sense of other people's. Amy talks about understanding where a parent of mixed race children is 'coming from' as she has a similar family composition herself. Jane, as well as expressing the potentially disabling responses above, talks about her own experiences as usefully informing her approach to service users who she regards as 'young and vulnerable' as she once was herself. Balancing this, there is some recognition that parallels with one's own experience can be ethically counter-productive if they lead to a focus on the self rather than the other person. Francesca, asked about the part ethics and values played in her child observation exercise, talks about how the observations triggered memories of her own early life, spent in Africa. This led her to compare the child's life to her own

early years, and to think about the day she would have liked him to have, instead of the one she saw:

> I would have given him a day where he would have had breakfast at home with his mum and chatted about whatever, you know, and then come in and played or gone outside and played …when I'm saying go outside and play, I mean when I was young, I used to climb trees and all sorts and I don't think, I don't think kids these days do that (…) I would give him freedom and time.

At this stage of her interview, the wistfulness in Francesca's tone suggested that she was immersed in reverie about her own past. Moreover, given references elsewhere in her interview to contemporary life being removed from the natural world and unhelpfully dominated by technology, there is a sense from Francesca of what she and humanity have lost. Going on to say that she had to remind herself that the task 'wasn't really about me', Francesca acknowledges that her reminiscences distracted her from her focus on the child, recognising that untrammelled emotional responses may limit engagement with others. This example also suggests that they may privilege personal assumptions – perhaps the boy himself would have loved to climb a tree, but equally he may have chosen to use the 'freedom and time' Francesca wanted to give him very differently.

The final perspective on feeling for others is that it may be misplaced if not tempered by cultural awareness. Balikis, whose child observation took place in a nursery, recounts her initial surprise at seeing such young babies in childcare. She

describes thinking 'oh my…[they're] so young' as 'Where I come from' [in Africa] babies stay with their mothers until they are around two years old, but goes on:

> …obviously in this country you have to go to work, if you don't go to work, you know you don't get paid.

This suggests that for Balikis, concern about young infants being away from their mothers reflects values out of place in England given the practical constraints women 'obviously' find themselves under. From this perspective, feelings for others need to be mediated by an awareness of context. This suggests a very different experience than that expressed at the other extreme of the continuum of feeling for others. There, ethical practice was founded on empathic understanding. Here, feelings may need to be set aside in favour of an acceptance of difference, bringing us to the next theme.

6.2.2 Accepting the individual: 'Everybody has different challenges'

This theme captures what participants have to say about making sense of others not by way of emotional closeness but rather by accepting them as individuals, each with their own unique characteristics and circumstances. The perspectives it includes fall short of the ethical principle of respect, as they do not include consideration of autonomy, but suggest something similar, if less developed.

Strikingly, and unlike the perspectives voiced in ‘Feeling for others’ above, participants talk about the acceptance of individuality as something they have learnt about, or come to understand more clearly, since starting their course. There is a range of experience portrayed here. One is of the course simply having enhanced existing understanding. Jane says that she has ‘always’ tried not simply to condemn people who do ‘horrendous things’ and moreover that her training as a counsellor has already taught her that ‘everyone’s not good, not bad, they’re okay’. She feels that new learning for her has been the significance for individuals of the circumstances and systems within which they live. Jane gives an example of responding to an incident of adult abuse in a care home, which she has seen reported on television:

> I can see beyond just [the perpetrator] being a bad person hitting a vulnerable person, to a whole system of …a whole flawed, poisonous system that she’s a symptom of ... I know she has choice and free will but (…) she shouldn't have been put there, people trying to save money have put her in a job that she was easy to pay nothing to do (…) I feel I can argue that a bit more now.

Jane’s view of the world has not been fundamentally changed, but she now has a clearer rationale for her existing disinclination to judge. Furthermore, Jane’s later assertion that she does not believe in evil but that ‘everything’s just a spectrum’ suggests that she recognises no limits to her capacity to see individuals, if not their actions, as ‘okay’.

Elsewhere there is a greater sense of participants' previous perceptions not merely being clarified, but of changing. Sometimes this is welcome. Francesca notes that her previous tendency to blame people for the outcomes of their actions has been challenged. Giving an example of her response to underage pregnancy, which she says used to be condemnatory but is now more accepting, she says that now she is less inclined to judge, and goes on:

> I'm a bit more confused about my ethics and values than I was when I started but I think I feel stronger in that I understand what my values and ethics aren't (…) I had quite a set mind at the beginning [of the course]

Francesca says that she likes herself more now, and anticipates further change ahead: there is a sense of a change of views as exhilarating and positive, and uncertainty as welcome. However, it can also be unsettling, as Amy conveys by looking both at her past and her (putative) future. Reflecting on the former, she recounts her past response to a depressed friend, now thrown into unflattering relief for her by her new recognition of the diverse challenges individuals may face:

> I'm going to sound like a horrible person, but basically my friend had depression and for a long while, 'cos I've always been a coper, I couldn't understand. I was just like what do you mean … get yourself together, like I feel awful for saying that to her now, and I probably wasn't the best friend that I could have been, but since doing the social work course, I see that not everybody starts off on the same kind of journey and everybody has different challenges (…) I definitely think it's changed a lot of my values and ethics.

For Amy, the course has provided a new and ethically transformative perspective that leads her to see her past self through new eyes. Again, the temporal aspect of ethical development is evident: the past appears changed by the new understanding brought to bear in the present. No longer assuming that others' responses to life's challenges will be the same as her own, and responding to them on that basis, Amy now regrets having done so in the past. Amy's capacity not to judge remains under development. Speaking about people who claim welfare benefits when they are in her view able to work – and noting that she herself has 'always worked hard for what I've got' - she goes on:

> That, that's one thing that I'm struggling with at the moment, because in social work, you know, you should be not judging people (…) I find that hard.

Amy does not present a solution here but rather acknowledges that having become aware of her preconceptions (in classroom learning on discrimination) she realises that 'I need to probably deal with that at some point'. There is a sense of attitudes being recognised as not fitting for a social worker and requiring attention in due course, again suggesting an awareness of change yet to come.

A third perspective on individuality emphasises the acceptance of difference, with the added dimension of not simply accepting it in others but of being aware that one is potentially different oneself. Balikis, having noted her experience that while she

has been on the course her ethics and values 'have been changed, they've been challenged, yes definitely, a lot' says:

> I've just come to realise that people are different really, everybody's different and what is normal to me is not normal to somebody else, or what is normal to them is not normal to me.

Balikis' interview overall is marked by numerous examples of differences she notes between values prevalent in her African country of origin and in England, and her responses to these. For example, she talks about being able now to work with gay people and accept how they choose to live, while having previously 'struggled with the sexuality thing'. There is also a sense of individuals being seen from various perspectives, with the eye of the beholder shaping what is different and what is not.

This concludes the report of the Year 1 sample results. Together, the two super-ordinate themes have conveyed a growing grasp of the range of activities and issues that can be regarded as ethically relevant. Participants' principal concern is making sense of the ethics and values that underpin the social work profession, and their relationship with them. Career motivations are ascribed to personal experience leading to a drive to help other people, sometimes in ways in which participants were not helped themselves. There is no direct reference to social justice or structural disadvantage. Rather, what participants have to say about how ethical considerations inform working with people emphasises emotional responses to individuals, with empathy providing an impetus to action but with its possible

challenges nonetheless being recognised. There are intimations of a developing awareness of the importance of valuing individuality and difference. Overall there is a sense of both participants finding their chosen profession and also of change and challenge, underway and yet to come – initially in Year 2 of the course, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: The Year Two results

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the Y2 data. When I interviewed the Y2 participants, they had all completed their first period of assessed practice learning. Each was placed in an agency offering social care or related services within the voluntary sector, and their placement portfolio work included written accounts of their practice in which they were expected to make links with social work values. The Y2 participants' details are summarised below.

Table 11: Year 2 participants

Name in study	Ethnicity	Age at start of course	Faith
Linda	White British	49	None
Mavis	Black African	38	Christian
Pauline	Black African	40	Christian
Sarah	White British	44	Christian

As in the previous chapter, the account of the Y2 results is organised around the super-ordinate themes and group themes that I developed, supported with participants' words. Again like the Y1 results, the analysis of the Y2 data produced two super-ordinate themes, each comprising two group themes in which contributions from all four participants in the sample appear.

Table 12: Year 2 analysis summary

Super-ordinate themes	Group themes	Representation
The worth of service users	Respect: 'In my mind I'm not judging them'	All participants
	Caring holistically: 'Social workers worry more about the person as a whole'	All participants
Ethical engagement with social work	Feeling the fit: 'All the things I've done have brought me here'	All participants
	Ethical discomfort: 'Maybe I care too much'	All participants

7.1 Super-ordinate theme 1: The worth of service users

This super-ordinate theme, dominant in the dataset, incorporates two themes that articulate participants' ethical understandings of the value of service users. One shows service users being regarded as autonomous individuals, intrinsically owed respect. The other conveys the concern participants feel for them, in the context of their particular circumstances and particularities.

7.1.1 Respect: 'In my mind I'm not judging them'

This theme was developed to capture how participants talk about the principle of recognising service users as autonomous individuals. While there is general

concurrence about its importance, there is a range of emphases in how it should be incorporated into practice and the challenges for workers that this may involve.

One perspective emphasises service user choice. Mavis and Pauline express this in similar terms, Mavis noting that 'social work values allow people to exercise their self-determination, so in my mind I'm not judging them' and Pauline that social workers ask 'how we can support this person to achieve whatever they want to achieve'. Equally, both speak of their Christian and personal beliefs, which at times jar with the choices service users make, and describe consciously putting their personal values aside concerning particular issues including sexual behaviour and alcohol use. They diverge in the practice challenges they identify. For Pauline, it is important that she should not impose her values on other people:

> Where I think my own personal values are sort of like prejudiced, I feel like I am accommodative, but what if I'm thinking that I'm giving somebody advice yet I'm actually pushing for my own personal values?

Pauline acknowledges the role of self-awareness in respecting service users' autonomy: unless personal values are recognised, their impact on work with service users may go unchecked. For Mavis, conversely, the challenge is the management of her own values in such a way that she does not feel personally compromised. Describing her initial discomfort supporting young women on placement who may be considering having a termination of pregnancy, counter to her own beliefs about what is right, she says:

> I actually didn't have to give advice that was coming from my opinion or anything, it was like giving them advice on, on where they can go and so that, just so that they know they have a choice, it wasn't, I wasn't advocating for, for abortion which is what I didn't want to do, so there was a bit of compromise.

Here, greater understanding of the professional role makes a comfortable position possible. Mavis is supporting informed choice, not how the service user decides to exercise it. These two participants also talk, elsewhere in their interviews, about having become aware of cultural differences since moving to the UK from Africa. Perhaps personal experience of an initially unfamiliar culture has sensitised them to values in practice, just as in my experience as an academic I have seen students whose second language is English take more conscious care with grammar than native speakers.

Sarah voices a different challenge regarding service user autonomy, in her example of young people she worked with on placement rejecting opportunities to choose who should attend an awards evening:

> This is the frustrating thing, they say 'you don't listen to us', 'you don't hear what we want' … and then they don't really engage. But I think at least then they know that we're trying.

Here, Sarah acknowledges that providing service users with opportunities to choose does not invariably mean that they will be taken up, but that there is value in doing it nonetheless. Implicit in this, perhaps, is an acceptance that not choosing constitutes a choice in itself, perhaps explicable given the circumstances of some service users' lives. Another perspective lays greater emphasis on service users taking responsibility, and is less accepting of their not doing so. Linda gives an example of service users in a mental health setting having chosen to co-operate with one another and with staff to maintain a garden smoking shelter in good order but then failing to uphold the agreement. For Linda, pointing this out to them is her responsibility:

> That's what was agreed so that other people who don't smoke can sit in the garden and can enjoy it and not have smoke in their faces. I sort of think that's the correct way for a social worker to respond, to remind people to do it. You don't have to be sergeant major about it and say 'right, we're going to have a routine and everyone's going to sweep up on Thursdays at four o'clock'. But, you know, just to sort of remind people that okay, they've got a mental health illness but they're not incapable of going through with that.

Elsewhere Linda notes the importance of choice in terms of how she conducts herself towards service users, giving examples of asking for consent before making telephone calls or otherwise intervening on their behalf. Here, she talks instead about holding them responsible for commitments they have to others: with the right to choose comes the responsibility to be consistent, where the wellbeing of others is involved. From this perspective, respecting an individual means not only having

regard for the choices they make about their own lives in isolation but also seeing them as social beings whose actions may have an impact on those around them. For Linda, a dimension of the social work role is not only to harness people's capabilities to make choices about what they want themselves, but also to steer them towards discharging their responsibilities to other people. A corollary of this is that her ethical position includes attention to the service users' values as well as her own. Unlike Pauline, she does not question whether what she says to service users reflects her personal priorities – in this case, the importance of clean and tidy surroundings - which they may not share.

Finally, participants talk about the importance of not judging service users on the basis of their having made apparently unwise choices. Sarah recounts hearing a qualified social worker telling a young girl abused within a gang that she is 'bad at picking boyfriends':

> …which made me think actually, the [situation] wasn't a picking of a boyfriend, that was a grooming, a sexual exploitation.

Here, a danger of judging is recognised: it may paint victim as perpetrator. Similarly, Linda talks about her responses to a girl's challenging behaviour in the context of the abuse that the girl has experienced:

> She's had a horrible, horrible life. So whilst what she did was really bad, I can see why, how it happened. It

> doesn't mean it was right. She knows what she did was wrong.

Here Linda defends the service user by arguing for her capacity to do what was 'right' having been weakened by her circumstances. In both these examples, being able to see a reason for a service user's behaviour provides an antidote to judgment and equally there is an implication that rushing to judgment indicates a lack of understanding. However, there is a sense that for Linda, some factors may be taken in mitigation while others are not. In the example above of the smoking shelter, she made clear that mental illness did not excuse poor behaviour; here it seems that having been abused does.

Finally in this theme, a further perspective returns to the issue of cultural difference. Pauline talks about her upbringing in an African culture where people, and women especially, were routinely judged and found wanting on the basis of their dress, conduct and manners. Contrasting this with her experiences in England, she says:

> Coming into this country, I realised you know what, just live your life, nobody cares about you. It's do what you want to do as long as you're not hurting anybody, as long as you're willing to face the consequences

Here, Pauline suggests that the new freedom she has found as a woman in England brings with it responsibilities, requiring ownership of the outcomes of her actions.

7.1.2 Caring holistically: 'Social workers worry more about the person as a whole'

Here, participants talk about their experiences of recognising and engaging with the practical, physical and structural details of service users' lives, with these then providing the context for their ethical sense of what needs to be done.

Participants identify a holistic approach to working with people as characteristic of social work and marking it out from other professions. Mavis says that social workers 'address the system straightaway, every section of it, you know, every effect on somebody's life'; Pauline that 'social workers worry more about the person as a whole'. For Sarah, in social work 'there's more of a holistic view' than she experienced in her previous career as a nurse. Seeing the whole person is portrayed as operating on a number of levels. This includes, for some participants, a global perspective, which echoing the theme above can raise questions about the morality of service users themselves. Both Mavis and Pauline, who have moved from Africa to England, note the lack of welfare provision in their countries of origin. Pauline, having stated that she was brought up to believe that 'those that do not work will not eat', goes on to explain that university teaching has:

> Opened my mind to say it can happen to anybody, it's just that there's this, I don't know, branding, stereotyping around people who claim benefits but it can be anybody, for whatever reason, you can fall – you can, having been a professional and not being able to work for so long, you still need to live.

Here, Pauline recognises that the attitudes that once led her to question the decision to claim welfare benefits have been recalibrated by her experiences on the course, such that she now grasps the geographically situated nature of need. Nonetheless, traces of her earlier position are discernible in her example of a 'professional' who has fallen on hard times. The implication here is that for Pauline the route by which people become welfare recipients is significant, with some being more deserving than others. Global comparisons also resonate for Sarah, whose journey between the richer and poorer parts of the world has taken her in a reverse direction from Mavis and Pauline. Talking about the 'whole different perspective' on poverty she gained in her work with a voluntary organisation in Asia, Sarah describes her experiences since returning to England:

> We are very rich in what we have and we don't even acknowledge it and we aren't even, in some ways, appreciative of it, you know?

For Sarah, this global gulf between rich and poor remains problematic, and there is a sense that having had her eyes opened by her experiences abroad she is unable, or unwilling, to shut them again.

On a more local level, participants talk about how grasping – or failing to grasp - the realities of the social systems within which people's lives are situated may affect the success of interventions intended to help them. Mavis talks about a young person who has been successfully rehoused:

> They moved on but problems started to emerge that hadn't been addressed. So to me the problem hasn't been solved, you know, as social workers we will look at … the whole person.

For Mavis, social work is based on an appreciation of all aspects of a service user's circumstances; interventions that do not reflect this may simply shift presenting difficulties from one aspect of their life to another. Furthermore, there is an intimation of social worker' approach being preferable to other professionals'. For Sarah, social work's holistic gaze complements the primary goal of her placement setting, which is education:

> They're brilliant at what they do in the education side of stuff but there was a huge big gap of meeting [service users'] social and emotional needs, which I've jumped into and that's been really good and I've loved it, kinda trying to help – because I think if you don't understand that, they're coming in to do an English exam but their mum and dad have had a domestic fight the night before, well how can they do well in their test?

While Sarah acknowledges the different priorities of education professionals, the image of her 'jumping' suggests that social workers do not simply recognise systems but work with them, here filling a void and bringing different aspects of children's lives together.

Finally in this theme, one of the means by which participants talk about achieving holistic understanding of service users is by finding personal points of contact, which

they do in a range of ways. With intimations of 'there but for the grace of God…' Linda describes a service user with whom she had things in common:

> I was concerned about this lady because she was the same age as me and we'd done very similar things… our schools were very close to one another […] she had got her English O-Level the same grade as me … she'd actually gone to a place that I'd gone to for an interview but I changed my mind. So we may even, our paths may even have crossed.

The word 'because' is telling here, as it suggests that it was the very parallels between Linda's own life and the service user's which drove her concern for her. This raises the question of whether points of correspondence with service users make caring about them easier – and equally whether it is more difficult to care about people whose circumstances are very different to ones own. Elsewhere, participants draw on their own experiences of overcoming various difficulties in life to express hope for service users. Mavis, talking about the early years she spent in England, says:

> Coming here has really humbled me …my situation when I first came to this country was a humble situation but it also impacted on me, I also became a humble person, when I look at somebody else going through difficult situations (…) because I was able to overcome, so I believe other people would be able to overcome with the right support.

Here, Mavis' repetition of 'humble' emphasises the impact on her of her own experiences, whereby having been 'brought down' to a more lowly level she can now empathise with those in a similar plight. There is a sense here of the capacity to feel for others being borne out of setting pride aside, in an acknowledgement of shared humanity. Elsewhere, participants enter into service users' experiences by way of imagination. Here, they may not find specific parallels between their own lives and service users', but nonetheless focus on the details of their circumstances to feel for them. Pauline, for example, as noted above, expresses the view that her placement team 'drops' young people unfairly quickly due to its rules about prompt cessation of involvement after a set period of time. In doing so she goes on to imagine how they feel:

> They end up disappointed again, just when they start believing, thinking 'Oh yes, I can actually do this, I can actually wake up every morning and go to work, it's possible'

There is sense that understanding the right thing to do for service users is heightened by getting close to their experience. Sarah, similarly, imagines what a young person may have been feeling about her life:

> She was fed up of her life the way it was, she didn't have anywhere that she could go, she was feeling unwell, she hadn't got, she was on heart tablets which she didn't have … erm, you know and she was just thinking actually it's a load of poo!

Sarah goes on to draw on her understanding of the young woman's feelings to make sense of how she later behaves, suggesting that imagination can facilitate the suspension of judgment. Finally Linda, uniquely of the participants, talks about what life is like for a service user in terms of incredulity, in an example of a woman who has had all her children removed:

> I always used to think about her sitting in that cold room, on her own… she was never going to have [her children] back because so much had gone wrong in the past and it probably would, would never go right. But, but it was almost like how can somebody have nine children and them all be taken away?

Here, Linda's words suggest that feeling for others has its limits: while this service user may have 'always' been in Linda's mind, her situation proved to be beyond an empathetic response. In this example, rather than reflection on other people's lives enabling understanding, it underlines instead the incomprehensibility of their circumstances.

7.2 Super-ordinate theme 2: Ethical engagement with social work

This super-ordinate theme was developed to bring together the ways in which participants talk about their ethical engagement with social work. First, 'Feeling the 'fit' ' conveys the meanings for participants of the ethical considerations that initially

drew them to the profession and the ways in which their understandings of ethics and values have since been refined. Then, 'Ethical discomfort' expresses their questions and doubts about whether the social work role accords with their own ethical goals in working with people. In relation to the latter theme, engagement has a secondary sense, of embarking on conflict.

7.2.1 Feeling the fit: 'All the things I've done have brought me here'

This theme captures the ways in which participants talk about the meaning for them of ethics in social work, including their initial attraction to the profession, the process of questioning and reflection, and an awareness of personal change. Overall, it represents a dynamic experience, and conveys a sense of accommodation and assimilation as initial understandings are modified.

Talking about their desire to become a social worker, participants across the sample cite their family and culture as providing the broad context for their ethical understanding. For Mavis, her upbringing directly predisposed her towards social work. Not only was it characterised by 'a lot of respect', but wanting to care for others was also 'in me', illustrated by the role she took on in her family:

> In my family always I've been (…) not the oldest but always the one who looks out for other people, so when I came [to England] that's what made me decide, 'okay, [social work] is me'… it has to do with my- my background as well because

> where I come from there's no, established welfare system and families look out for each other so … probably that's the basis and then obviously […] my Christianity…I was put on this earth for a purpose and I believe that purpose is what I'm serving.

Describing the role she took on, Mavis suggests that her caring disposition arose out of something intrinsic to herself, not simply her birth order amongst her siblings. Moreover, her reference to her 'purpose' perhaps implies the will of her god. Mavis conveys too that this identity was formed within a wider culture of self-help and guidance from her faith, with her tendency to look out for others suggesting an ethical orientation towards both care and protection. However, upbringing does not necessarily provide a positive spur in this way. For Sarah, rather than directly forming the values and skills that would in due course lead her towards social work, her childhood provided experiences that she would not wish to repeat in adulthood:

> Some of my family values help me to know how not to do things… I came away from that thinking, 'I wouldn't do things like that'… at times it was not a very nice place to be.

Against this background, Sarah goes on to talk about her work first as a nurse in the UK and then overseas:

> I've seen through my nursing, how illness can affect a whole family and how you can help, you know, just by caring, by listening (…) I also lived in [Asian country] for eight years and in that time, I worked with a lot of disadvantaged and poor families (…) Things that go on in the family can affect their life

> for a long time. I came back feeling like I really wanted to do social work so that I could have a professional qualification in order to help disadvantaged families.

Sarah's upbringing began a process for her of coming to understand the significance of family life, and of recognising her own desire and abilities to help people whose families are going through difficult experiences. Furthermore, social work enables her to help others 'just by caring' but also with a focus on disadvantage, although we have seen above that Sarah's global perspective presents challenges.

Family background can also provide more explicit encouragement towards social work. Pauline says that she had 'always wanted' a social work career because her mother was a social worker in the family's home country in Africa. There, Pauline's childhood experiences of social work included seeing older people and people with disabilities queuing outside her mother's office as they waited for parcels of 'the basics, soap, washing soap, bathing soap, sugar and what not'. On coming to England, Pauline gained a different image of the profession, and saw how social workers supported people excluded from their wider community because of their disability. Describing the social workers who visited residents in the establishment where she worked as a carer, she goes on:

> That is what really got my heart 'cause you'd come in and things would be in shambles and along with the social workers, you'd work together and somebody would start living a life instead of just laying there and waiting to die […] that is what attracted me to think again, 'I might still want to do social work', maybe for a better reason this time.

This suggests that for Pauline, English social work is not simply about subsistence, but transforming people's existence from unhappy chaos – with 'shambles' suggesting mess and dehumanisation - to 'living a life'- a process which she feels in her heart. Why she thinks of the changed basis for her motivation to become a social worker as 'better' is not clear, although its emotional power for her is apparent. Nonetheless, her choice to talk about her experiences in Africa suggests that for Pauline they are part of the story of her life that leads to where she is now. Similar intimations of the retrospective construction of a narrative are evident elsewhere. Linda, having described wanting to become a social worker because she enjoys 'helping people' says:

> I never had a longer-term ambition, but when I wrote my personal statement for university I realised that all the things I'd done in my life have (…) brought me here, if that makes sense.

Despite the relatively short-term nature of Linda's explicit ambition to study social work – in her case arising from an opportunity arising out of redundancy – it seems to her with hindsight that she has long been moving towards the profession. Overall, participants' words suggest that the ethical drivers that lead them towards social work have a significant history in their lives, or at least that it is important for them that this appears to be the case. Professional identity arises out of, rather than is bolted on to, what has gone before.

Moving on from early motivation, participants talk about their growing awareness and understanding of ethics and values in the course of their social work education. There are two dimensions to this. The more prevalent across the data is the meaning for participants of ethical expectations of themselves in their work with service users. The other is their awareness of personal change. The first of these is characterised by participants talking about an initial drive for closeness and responsiveness to others mitigated by a growing development of a professional persona. The ways in which they experience this varies. One perspective is of the importance of boundaries. Sarah illustrates this in her example of 'a great big ethical boo-boo', in which she disclosed her son's name to a group of young service users in the town where she lives:

> Straightaway after I said it… I'm thinking 'oh God, this is a really bad mistake', and so afterwards I went and spoke to my manager, I said 'I'm really sorry, I've kind of done the wrong thing'.

Noting her subsequent reflection about how her disclosure might compromise her family's privacy on social media, or even their physical safety, Sarah describes the event as 'a real learning point about boundaries for me'. This is not necessarily portrayed as an entirely positive experience: Sarah's further considerations about the episode raise questions about her ease with professional identity which will be explored further, in the theme 'Ethical discomfort', below. Here, two elements of Sarah's experience of the expectations of her are noteworthy. First, she comments on the very different relationships she experienced with service users in her work in

Asia which ‘wasn’t a job, it was my life, we would have [service users] around our house for dinner’. Second, she says ‘I wouldn't have a problem talking about my family as a nurse because nurses are looked at in a different light’. Thus, drawn to social work by experiences of working with people that were characterised by closeness, Sarah finds that this is unacceptable in her chosen profession. In social work, Sarah notes, maintaining clear boundaries between personal and professional worlds is an ethical imperative – ‘so maybe I shouldn’t be a social worker, I hug people!’ Her struggles with this are suggested further when she talks about her work with a young girl who did not have the money for a plaque in remembrance of her stillborn baby:

> If I had £95, I’d have given the £95 and I would pretend it came from somewhere else … …If I was a social worker, that wouldn't be allowed…Wouldn't, wouldn't be right. I don't know [laughs]. Would it? I don't know. Getting all upset now. I just, yeah, maybe I care too much, I don't know.

Sarah’s contradictory statements and presentation here, including laughter and tears, and her repetition of ‘I don’t know’, evinced the quandary she experienced as she wondered whether she cares ‘too much’ to be a social worker. Pauline also provides an example of an ethical tension that centres on material hardship. Asked for an example of having to weigh up different ethical considerations, she talks about a ‘dilemma’ in her work with a young man in financial difficulties but ‘too proud’ to use a food bank. Having explained that ‘I just thought I can’t exactly cross the boundaries and give him £20, or say let’s go to Tesco’s’, Pauline goes on:

> …because I'm a student, I didn't want to jeopardise my course but to be honest, if I had been a qualified social worker with some experience, I probably would have done it and been willing to stand up and explain myself.

There is a sense here of Pauline learning the expected response but anticipating a time when experience and qualified status will permit more flexibility, and perhaps closer adherence to her own ethical beliefs. Pauline is perhaps learning professional rules in order to know when they can be broken in the future. There is a divergence here between Sarah and Pauline. In Pauline's words, we see her feeling more ethically constrained as a student than she anticipates being as a qualified professional. For Sarah the reverse appears true: as a qualified social worker, she anticipates that giving money 'wouldn't be allowed', whereas now she would give the money if she could. For these participants being a student is ethically salient, but in different ways. What they have in common, however, is that responses to a lack of financial resources focus on whether or not to hand money to an individual, rather than on wanting to challenge material inequalities at a structural level.

Another perspective on ethical expectations is of the importance of the correct professional persona. Linda, asked about her ethical base, describes having changed while on the course. Previously, she says, her inclination was to want to 'tell people' what to do. Now, she takes a more measured approach, for example in an example of working with a service user whose perceived parenting deficiencies include leaving waste bins overflowing:

> I don't want to be pally-pally and make her think that I'm being her friend (…) and I don't want to be strict and stern and 'you will empty the bin' type of thing. It's finding that sort of bit in-between (…) what I've learned on this course is I can't go in and be this client's best friend and side with her, and I can't go in and be all strict and school teachery.

Here, it seems that professionalism facilitates honesty by avoiding the presentation of false friendship - the service user would, after all, only 'think' that Linda was her friend. There is a sense of Linda negotiating her way to an empowering space between the misleadingly friendly on the one hand and the unhelpfully directive on the other. Linda highlights the potential paradox here when she goes on to say that she hopes to 'make [the service user] think how she's going to solve that bin problem' herself. Here, the use of 'make' suggests that Linda nonetheless retains something of the 'teachery' role, just as her earlier example of the untidy smoking shelter made clear that for her, exerting authority (with the image of a 'sergeant major' rejected but nonetheless introduced) is part of being a social worker. For Pauline, this is also true but may be tempered by the use of humour. Having described engaging with young people by using jokes against herself and being self-deprecating, Pauline talks about this involving her presenting herself in a way very different to that expected of adults in her own childhood:

> When we grew up, the adults were always right and you always took the adults' advice and I always think, 'Okay, you're younger than me, listen to me, I'm telling you if you do this, do it this way, it's going to work'. But especially in this placement, I've realised, working with younger people,

> there's so many ways of killing a cat, as long as it gets us to the same place.

Pauline suggests here that makes values right to enact in a given set of circumstances may simply be their efficacy in reaching the desired outcome. This situated nature of professional presentation of values is expanded upon in an example from Mavis. Asked about any practice experiences that involved her having to think about ethical issues, Mavis talks about her placement duties in an organisation whose service users were young people facing homelessness. Part of Mavis' role involved serving notices to quit to service users who have broken the terms of their contract. In one example, she describes her initial disquiet at doing this and having to present herself as 'sort of' threatening to a young man who is 'crying his eyes out, he's got nowhere else to go' but goes on to acknowledge that it provides the spur he needs:

> It was an encouragement for him to do the things that he was supposed to do (…) now I'm saying it was the right thing to do because of the outcomes.

Thus, like the example from Pauline, above, Mavis' changed view of what was 'the right thing to do' suggests a shift from responding to service users simply as they present to one informed by administrative priorities. Mavis' example also suggests the fluidity of ethical judgment, with what appears wrong as it is lived being deemed right when assessed retrospectively and in the context of what the young man 'was supposed to do' as a user or the service. The unexpressed converse to this is that what seems the right thing to do at a given time may, with hindsight, look wrong.

Just as ethical expectations are geographically and professionally situated, as suggested by the different requirements Sarah experiences as NGO worker, nurse and social work student, so temporality offers a further perspective on what is ethically correct. A corollary here is that deciding what is ethically right requires a readiness to reflect on ethical requirements in a given set of circumstances. As Sarah notes, asked to expand on her comment that reflection is important in thinking about doing her best for service users: 'How can you have an ethical practice if you aren't reflecting on your ethics?'

Finally, this theme captures the ways in which participants talk about changes to their ethical identity outside the course but that they nonetheless regard as a consequence of their social work education. One perspective on this has intimations of personal transformation. Another simply implies acquisition of a new set of skills or strategies, although there is inevitably some overlap here given the concept in social work of the self as a tool. Illustrating the former, Sarah talks about her heightened awareness of discriminatory language - social workers do not simply use acceptable terminology for appearance's sake but because 'there's a heart behind it' – which suggests personal change beyond the classroom:

> I'm more aware of people who are prejudiced in what they say, like you know 'the Pakis' (…) it grates on me, it makes me think 'ooh that's not very nice to call them that', you know... I'm thinking about things in a different way and that's because of the values and the ethical kind of thing.

There is a sense here of this change being part of the process of taking on the ethical aspect of the social work identity, although the perspective that informs this is unclear. Sarah asserts that 'we' do not use certain sorts of language, but her emphasis is on certain words not being 'nice' for the recipient to hear, rather than on the societal marginalisation they may reflect. Furthermore, despite the compartmentalisation between her personal and professional life with which we have seen Sarah struggle elsewhere, what she says here conveys a merging of the two. An example from Mavis suggests that ways in which social work students may change may have unexpected consequences. Mavis explains that earlier in her life, she always tended to seek agreement in her personal relationships. Since being on the course, however, she has noticed a difference in herself: now 'if someone has their opinion, I leave them to it'. Mavis explains that as a result of this, while she has become more accepting of views different to her own, she is also less inclined than she was to strive to preserve ailing relationships:

> Now I just, I don't know if it's negative or positive, I don't try hard with relationships, if somebody doesn't want to have a relationship with me, whether it's a family member or it's a friend, you know I just … think okay, that's their decision, you know, I don't have to be in their life, they don't have to be in my life.

While Mavis' words here suggest that this change is not necessarily clearly good or bad, her smiles and laughter at this point of the interview suggested that it was on the whole something she welcomed. This raises the potential for education to effect

transformation beyond individuals' understanding, affecting their lives in their interpersonal context.

7.2.2 Ethical discomfort: 'Maybe I care too much'

This theme is less prevalent in the data than the one above but is vividly expressed, with detailed examples and animated presentation. It captures the significance for participants of their experiences of the gap between what they regard as ethically correct practice in principle, and what various constraints impose in practice.

One way in which participants make sense of such instances is to adopt a superficially paradoxical position whereby they lay responsibility at the door of agencies and systems while asserting that they are nonetheless benign. Mavis, for example, talks about having offered to complete case chronologies on placement but meeting barriers: 'not that I'm saying it's a bad place or anything, but I didn't quite find the support'. Asked about what the chronologies would have enabled her to achieve, she explains:

> I would have been able to work with the whole person and to understand the whole person instead of just understanding that oh they're homeless and they need JSA [Job Seekers' Allowance] and they need their rent paid and to do a referral to Mental Health Services, I feel

> that, that, that's not enough … I feel we really need to look at the whole person, to understand their circumstances.

The placement setting here was not a social work but a housing setting and so there is a dimension in Mavis' experience of different perspectives simply arising from different professional priorities. Nonetheless, there is a sense of her own ethical inclination being stifled, and of her being prevented from carrying out the sort of practice she feels is right. This disconnect between how work with service users should be done and how it takes place in reality may raise more troubling questions for participants where other professionals involved are social workers. Sarah talks feelingly about a young girl with whom she is working in her placement in a voluntary organisation, whose allocated social worker does not instigate very much direct contact. Sarah concludes:

> Although her social worker actually cares for her and wants to provide for her and tries to do the best for her, I think some of the other things are not being met, like encouraging someone and spending time with her.

This raises the question of the different sorts of care demonstrated by social workers based in different settings, here in voluntary and statutory agencies respectively. There is also a suggestion of an act of faith here. Sarah has committed herself to social work because she cares about others. Therefore, she concludes that those already in the profession must 'actually' care about them too, despite practice that might suggest something else to Sarah about the individual worker or about the

social work profession. Linda, similarly, compares her impressions of referring (local authority) social workers and staff in her (non-statutory) placement setting:

> …once [the local authority social workers] have referred the children to our agency they almost like sign them off their books …they don't seem worried, it almost seems as if, as if they've sort of moved them on somewhere so they can close them (…) in that respect I sort of feel that there is a sort of a difference in the values between the agency I'm working with and, and the social workers. But then of course I don't know what's going in the social work office so there could be a very good reason for it, and they're probably all chock-a-block.

As in Sarah's example above there is an intimation here of social workers in statutory systems regarding service users less as people worthy of a relationship, but more as cases to be signed 'off their books'. Again, there appears to be a reluctance to condemn this, here arising from Linda's lack of knowledge about the pressures these statutory workers may be facing.

Finally in this theme, participants talk about their experiences of service users not simply being under-served or undervalued, but actively or potentially harmed. An example from Sarah draws on her experience of working with a young adult deemed not 'high risk' enough to be housed:

> If I had have been her, what I would have thought is, 'right, then I'll go out and do another suicide attempt if it gives me the chance of a house'.

This is an extreme example of the ethical injunction to do no harm being (possibly) ignored, as Sarah raises the possibility of the service user's treatment by housing staff leading to her death. Nonetheless, it is also a further instance of reluctance to lay blame at the door of individuals - the housing worker himself, Sarah says, was simply relaying policy, and in himself was 'so lovely' to the service user. Another experience is of offering an inadequate service being more harmful than offering none at all, for example Pauline's account of a service which offers young people support for a strictly limited period:

> When you can see somebody's actually making progress and they're coming along nicely, to just snip them off at 12 weeks […] before they're quite ready, we've dropped them and they go back again to their old lifestyle and I think we've, we've done them an injustice.

Here, rather than a predetermined period of intervention being seen as underpinned by a justifiable rationale it is portrayed as whimsical and dismissive. It carries too a sense of the young people's insignificance for the organisation, if they can be set aside with a mere 'snip' like an unwanted scrap of cloth. It is suggested too that these actions might be reinforcing a pattern in service users' lives of falsely raised hopes followed by inevitable disappointment. This presents a striking contrast to the image earlier in Pauline's interview of the service users she has seen 'laying there' being offered a positive future by social workers. Here, Pauline's regret at service users now being dropped, rather than lifted up, suggests that the areas of provision that cause her ethical discomfort are those which do not satisfy the drive which led

her to social work as a career. Furthermore, in this instance Pauline does not distance herself from the organisation or present a rationale for decisions made – it is 'we' who have let the young people down. Generally, however, as we have seen, where participants express ethical disquiet at how service users are treated, they suggest reasons that lay responsibility at the door of an abstract bureaucracy rather than individual workers. There is an interesting parallel here with participants' reluctance to blame service users for their actions, noted earlier in this chapter. Both stances suggest an adherence to a belief in fundamental human goodness, albeit with it being challenged and compromised by circumstances.

The Year 2 results as a whole show participants making sense of social work in terms of both their ethical affinity with it and, to a lesser extent, various degrees of ethical discomfort and doubt. Experiences illustrating the latter are often highly detailed practice examples, showing participants engaging with the specificities of people's lives and with the potential for decisions made in the course of intervention to do harm as well as good. Ethically informed work with service users is articulated with predominant emphasis on the significance of respect and the importance of not judging individual choices, rather than ambitions to challenge inequalities at a structural level. The overall impression is of participants orienting themselves ethically in two ways, in relation to social work and to service users, and expressing with various emphases their uncertainty about what is ethically correct in relation to both. For these participants, statutory services, sometimes perceived as unresponsive or uncaring, are viewed externally. What participants make of ethics as

statutory insiders, from the perspective of placements in statutory social work settings, is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Eight: The Year Three results

This final results chapter turns to the analysis of the Y3 sample. The sample comprised eight participants, as follows:

Table 13: Year 3 participants

Name in study	Ethnicity	Age at start of course	Faith
Annie	Black African	45	Christian
Barbara	Black African	34	Christian
Chloe	White British	39	None
Grace	Black African	19	Christian
Jess	Black African	37	Christian
Katrina	White British	21	None
Mary	White British	23	Christian
Teresa	Black African	29	Christian

Each of these participants had completed, or was close to completing, her last [100 day] practice learning placement when I interviewed her. Reflecting the requirements of the qualifying curriculum for final placements (see Chapter Two), each was placed in an agency that provided opportunities to engage, with support, with statutory social work tasks. The Y3 results are structured like those for the Y1 and Y2 analyses in the two preceding chapters. Three super-ordinate themes arose from the Y3 analysis, each comprising two group themes. The group themes that make up the first two super-ordinate themes presented here reflect contributions from all eight participants in the sample. In the third super-ordinate theme, six

participants are represented in one group theme and five in the other. Three participants contribute to both of these group themes.

Table 14: Year 3 analysis summary

Super-ordinate themes	Group themes	Representation
Becoming a social worker	Ethical commitment: 'A lot of growth from where I started'	All participants
	Minding the gap: 'I wouldn't impose my values'	All participants
Attending to others	Regard for individuals: 'Putting the service user first'	All participants
	Compassion: 'You take on their fears'	All participants
The challenge of 'the system'	Tolerating ethical constraint: 'Everything has to be ticked'	Six participants (Annie, Barbara, Chloe, Grace, Katrina and Mary)
	Negotiating ethical obstacles: 'Get around it, in a way'	Five participants (Grace, Jess, Katrina, Mary and Teresa)

8.1 Super-ordinate theme 1: Becoming a social worker

This super-ordinate theme captures how participants talk about the ethics and values that informed their decision to pursue a social work career, and their continued development since. Its name also carries a secondary sense of conduct befitting a social worker, as it incorporates participants' understandings of the

behaviour and values that social workers are expected to show, and how their own might have to be moulded or managed accordingly.

8.1.1 Ethical commitment: 'A lot of growth from where I started'

This theme conveys what participants have to say about the interface between their own ethics and values and those of social work. There are three elements here, and a temporal flavour. First, participants' ethical dispositions drive them towards social work. Then, their ethical understandings of social work are moderated to incorporate the ethical realities they encounter. Finally, ethics and values characteristic of social work are assimilated into their lives outside the course.

Participants convey their motivations in applying to study social work as part of an evolving history of wanting to work with people, with emphases including care (Annie), help (Chloe and Grace), working with the whole person (Barbara) advocacy (Jess and Mary) and empowerment (Katrina and Teresa). The roots of these motivations are variously located. One emphasis is on the influence of others, at home or at work. All the participants talk about the significance of their family, with perspectives broadly taking two forms. One is of particular experiences having led participants to want to do for others what they saw not being done for relatives or for themselves. Chloe, having described a relative's unhappy experience of being in an institution, says:

> This desire to … help people is there but it's more of how I felt about certain things when I was growing up and thinking that if a family member had had better help at the time and then having that desire, that feeling that actually I could, I could do that, I could do that for people, I know I could do that.

There is a sense here both of reparation - making good for something in the past, albeit something for which Chloe herself was not responsible – and also a tentatively expressed ability, indicated by the repetition of 'could'. Together, these suggest a sense of duty: being able to put things right brings with it the responsibility to try to do so, even if it is not immediately easy. Teresa offers a similar example: having seen her terminally ill mother deprived of all self-belief and hope, she wants to bring hope to others. The other effect of family influence is in terms of its overall ethical culture and the value base this generates. Jess notes the significance of this:

> We always used to have extended family around (…) that's where I got my values to value other people. It's more because of my family background and my parents, they were always accommodating… I question people who don't have those values, who grew up in an environment where they're the only one, the only child and they're self centred, they're selfish, how can you change a person like that to start practising and acting to apply social justice with empathy when they don't know nothing of that sort.

There is an irony here, in that Jess talks about her family culture of acceptance while, it appears, excluding people with different sorts of backgrounds to her own from social work. This is noteworthy in the context of Jess' interview as a whole. Across

the transcript, there are frequent examples and imagery drawing on concepts of accommodation versus exclusion. It may be that for this participant one is in a position of being either in or out, with no middle ground, and she is already an insider with regard to social work. This raises questions about what Jess may feel she still has to learn, and about her attitude towards service users' capacity for change. Mary gives greater prominence to work experiences. While acknowledging the influence of her family culture of fairness, which she says reflects her Christian upbringing, she highlights her role as administrator in a community mental health team. It was this, she says, that 'inspired me to think, well who does stand up for people who aren't able to stand up for themselves?' Mary continues:

> …it seemed like when things were going on for our service users it was always the social workers that were, you know, staying behind late, doing late visits, you know, just generally looking at people holistically as opposed to looking at them in a medical kind of way… social workers were able to challenge and, you know, say, 'Actually that's not right' and look at the person in terms of, like, their networks, not just them and medication.

The perspective of the social workers Mary describes here is thrown into relief for her by what she perceives as the more limited focus of medical and nursing staff. In her view, not only do social workers relate to service users beyond labels and office hours, but their practice is also informed by considerations of right and wrong and includes taking an explicitly ethical stand where necessary.

Grace, uniquely in the sample, talks about her motivation to become a social worker as simply reflecting her characteristic drive to listen to and help others:

> I love to listen to people's problems, I've been doing that from young, I didn't know, my mum said I've been doing it since I was 10, just I can sit there and I can listen to problems all day, I would literally give all my time, my money, my effort … to another person, just help them get through their struggles, that's just the type of person I am, I still do it today, in my spare time, it's just who I am.

For Grace, this tendency does not originate in any element of nurture or experience but simply from the person she is. It may be significant that Grace embarked on her social work course at the age of 19. For her, intrinsic characteristics and values may serve as the raw material she brings to the course instead of the more extensive personal and work experience other students have to offer. Moreover, locating their origins at a time 'from young', which she cannot remember personally, provides a sense of their longevity. There is also some ambiguity here. Although her claims about social work being 'who I am' suggest ownership, at the same time Grace defines herself in part through her mother's eyes. Nonetheless, for all the participants there is a sense of their having a story to tell of their journey towards social work, in narratives suggesting clear cause and effect. Equally for each of them, while expressed with different emphases, social work appears to be a profession attractive by virtue of its perceived ethical mission.

Moving beyond motivation, participants recount growing understandings of professional ethical drivers beyond simply wanting to respond to others in difficulty. There is a sense here of a process not merely of accepting the expectations of their chosen profession but actively embracing them and grasping their rationale. One perspective is of a growing awareness that working with people does not necessarily mean doing what is easiest, and that particular workplace settings present their own ethical challenges. Chloe, talking about her placement in a mental health team, moves beyond her initial simply stated desire 'to help people' to articulate a commitment to recovery, which includes a responsibility to challenge service users in their own interests:

> You're a professional, you're not there as a friend … you're there to help them recover, not to gloss over issues that are affecting their mental health or their ability to cope in whatever situation… the whole point of you being involved is that they need help to recover, to get to a point where they can cope so if you don't challenge, you're, you're potentially helping them along that road to crisis, or not recovering.

For Chloe, failing to challenge may not merely hinder progress but actively cause harm, although her expression of this in the second person might suggest a process of distancing from the self as she takes on the professional role. Another ethical consideration voiced is the need for consistency between service users. Annie, having initially described herself as a 'people person' drawn to social work because she wanted to care for others, gives an example from her placement of being unable simply to hand money to a homeless service user with no recourse to public funds.

Here the ethical issue is less what might be in the individual service user's interests, as it was for Chloe, but more the need for equity:

> …it's difficult to (…) do things the way I would prefer them to be done because [social work is] everybody's profession and we have to do things the right way, we have to be fair to everybody.

Again the use of pronouns here is telling: ethically-informed professional practice is denoted by a shift from the perspective of 'I', able to respond to a single service user's needs in isolation from other considerations, to 'we' who have to think about 'everybody'. Barbara similarly uses language suggesting that she has already taken up the social work identity, comparing other professionals to 'us', and talks about her initial desire to work directly with people having developed into an acceptance of the administrative realities:

> When I started the placement I was thinking, 'oh, this is not what I wanted to do, I don't want to do so much paperwork, I don't want to do so much sitting behind a computer'. But then … through supervision …I also looked at it as being the management of someone's care as well…so it's not so much about the one- to- one interaction with service users but it's the coordination of their care and ensuring that you know, all the other things that need to be done around them are being done by the people that need to be doing them so that's (…) how I'm looking at it now.

Here the emphasis is not on an ethical perspective having changed, but rather on an altered understanding of how ethically informed goals are reached. While Barbara

recalls initially regretting the lack of time available to her to spend with service users, she has come to regard administration as an important aspect of care provision in itself, with supervision facilitating her acceptance of this. There is consistency with Barbara's early motivation to work with people 'in a holistic type of way' as the significance of systems is maintained, but alongside the realisation on her part that her own place in the system around the service user may be further removed from the individual than she had previously envisaged.

Finally, the theme includes what participants have to say about their ethics and values having changed in ways that affect their lives outside the course. Chloe and Jess both talk about their values not having changed at all. However, another perspective is of having become less inclined to be judgmental. Teresa describes 'a lot of growth from where I started', which she says informs her approach to disciplining her own children, now less reactive and giving them opportunities to learn and reflect:

> It is less stressful. I'm a happier person. I know that my children are disciplined and, and they're following principles they're supposed to be following, but at the same time it's easier for me. It's the easier option, trust me...I feel happier in knowing that at least they've, they've been given time to reflect on something, and grow from something.

Here, despite the disapproval of her changed parenting style by her wider family, which Teresa notes elsewhere, the repetition of 'easier' and 'happier' emphasises that for her this change has been for the better. Participants also talk about having

come to place greater value on people's independence. Katrina, describing her changed relationship with a relative, says:

> He'll ring me and say, can I have help with this please, and I'll go around and I will help him with it but I won't do it for him. I would have done, three years ago I would have done it for him because I thought I was helping him but now I won't. I'll make him do it but I'll help him with it, whatever it is and I think mine and his relationship is brilliant.

Again, this is experienced as a positive change, with Katrina's words also indicating a changed understanding on her part of what 'help' comprises: whereas previously she would have 'done it for him', now she offers assistance. Grace gives a possibly more ambiguous account of personal change:

> Since I've come onto this course, I don't find anything funny, I don't find anything funny… when I was younger, I would refer to a homeless person as a tramp (…) but [the course has] made me realise that do you know, no-one's actually really … born to be homeless (…) no-one's born mad … depression can lead someone to become homeless, you know, you don't know one's story as to how they got onto that street so how can you refer to them as a tramp if you don't know their story? …So things like that I don't, I don't find funny anymore.

Grace's acknowledgment of the insights the course has given her into people's difficulties and circumstances is clear. However, unlike other participants she does not volunteer information about having become happier, or exchanged old friends

for new, and her tone on the audio recording at this point was flat and subdued. Identifying with social work values may not inevitably be all about gain.

8.1.2 Minding the gap: 'I wouldn't impose my values'

The focus of this sub theme is how participants perceive and manage the interface between personal and professional ethics and values. The range of perspectives constitutes a continuum that starts with perspectives emphasising separation and moves towards those that place greater importance on congruence.

First, suggesting a process of compartmentalisation, Annie and Teresa each acknowledge the differences they perceive between the values expected of a social worker and those they grew up with, and describe applying different values at home and in practice. Different rationales underpin this. Annie notes the differences between what her faith in Africa had told her about same sex relationships and how she has changed her own approach, moving from intolerance to a respect for different choices. However, for Annie context is important - she notes that there are 'the right tools for the right place'. Giving a practice example, she acknowledges that while her own impulse would be simply to hand money to a service user in need, it is not permitted. She goes on:

> When I go home, honestly, I switch off, otherwise… I would not sleep, I would not smile, I would not laugh, I would not eat because of what is involved in social work.

Here, separation between professional and private worlds appears not merely unproblematic but essential, and inherently self-protective. Indeed for Annie, learning how to maintain the boundary between personal and professional life is an essential part of her social work education. Her skill in doing this is something her words and laughter suggest she values:

> That's why we do the training I suppose … if it were not for the training, one would get confused, if you just came from home and say 'I will be a social worker', you'd get confused because you'd be taking that home (…) And it's easy because when I'm at home, I'm myself, I smile, I talk a lot, I'm very talkative actually, when I'm here, I try to keep a very low profile! [laughs]. And people think 'Oh that one is a quiet one', but I'm not so it's easy to keep my home character from my work personality.

Conversely, Teresa shows a different understanding in her example of an adult safeguarding intervention. Describing this as presenting her with an 'ethical difficulty', in which it was necessary for her to challenge an older person who was a service user's carer, Teresa goes on:

> I have learnt to leave my values at the door (…) but that doesn't mean I throw them away…I come from a culture where, you know, you're not supposed to be tough on the elderly…but now I've learnt that at the end of the day I have to leave that behind the door, and then you know, if I come into a scenario where I have to challenge an individual because there, there's a potential for financial abuse, then you know, I have to do it.

Here, concern for a person who may be being abused trumps the deference for older people with which Teresa grew up: the separation between personal and professional values reflects concern for the service user, not the participant. Similarly, she notes that although her faith taught her as a child that same sex relationships were counter to the story of creation, she now respects choice and focuses on presenting need. Furthermore, while Annie speaks in terms of different selves, for Teresa continuity between the two realms is provided by her Christian faith. This she describes as accompanying her in both personal and professional realms: 'I go inside the door with it, because it's very crucial for me'.

Moving along the continuum, participants talk about how their personal values are managed rather than put aside. To draw on Teresa's metaphor, they are not left 'at the door' of practice but many need some attention having crossed the threshold. Mary gives an example of a home visit to a woman who is mentally unwell and possibly a danger to herself. Mary felt that her immediate reaction, based on a perception of possible risk to the service user, had to be curtailed:

> We can't make an assumptions about how she felt about the interview, if I was presenting as, 'Oh god, she's such a risk,' like then how did that make her feel about us coming out to see her? Because she might have felt that she was no risk to herself. Well, I hope I was a bit more professional than that and wasn't sitting, like, with my mouth on the floor or anything.

This is ethically significant in two ways. First, a drive to care is mitigated by respect for autonomy: these two ethical drivers are reflected further in the second super-ordinate theme, 'Attending to others', below. More significant for the present theme is Mary's awareness of her unmanaged response as having the power to harm. Self-control, as it was for Teresa, is thus directed at the wellbeing of the service user. There is a sense here of the 'gap' between a personal and professional ethical response being actively minded and managed, with this task in itself being ethically driven and a dimension of professionalism. From this perspective, self-awareness is in itself an ethical requirement. Mary later makes this explicit: asked at the end of her interview if she has anything to add, she says that she believes that ethics are learnt by means of reflection, both in and on action. Barbara voices a further perspective when recounting an experience of working with parents who had harmed their child. Supervising contact sessions, Barbara describes a 'constant battle' between her immediate impulse towards moral condemnation and the 'positive regard' she understands is expected of her. She goes on:

> My practice educator was quite good at, at you know, helping me to, to bring out what I felt, so kind of talking about it before I even saw the parent that, that helped a lot and, and thinking about the different possible things that could happen and how things might happen and what I might say or what I might not say and why I might be saying that.

Here, the personal management necessary to fulfil professional ethical expectations is aided by supervision, which provides a space within which uncertainty - the things

that ‘could’ or ‘might’ happen - can be explored. Barbara concludes that this ‘helped a lot’: ‘Minding the gap’ effectively, it seems, may require support.

Finally in this theme, perspectives are expressed that emphasise congruence, or a desire for congruence, rather than separation, between personal and professional values. Katrina shares an experience of carrying out an assessment of an older man’s capacity which involved asking him pre-planned questions:

> I knew all of them answers so that’s why I felt like I was tricking him, because I already knew those answers. I completely understand that it’s to understand whether he knows what support he needs but it just felt like a trick (…) it just felt wrong.

For Katrina, despite the assessment being part of a process aimed at reaching a positive outcome for a service user, the experience of carrying it out was ethically uncomfortable. Moreover, her repetition of ‘trick’ has intimations of entrapment for its own sake rather than as part of the exercise of professional authority. It is pertinent to consider here Katrina’s initial motivation to become a social worker, which she said was to help people with challenging behaviour achieve their potential. Having set out to maximise people’s capabilities, she now finds herself in a position of having to question them. Jess, similarly, emphasises the importance for her of honesty and consistency. As noted above, this participant makes clear the close marriage she perceives between the personal qualities instilled by her upbringing and those required of a social worker. Amplifying this, she comments

that her own and social work values closely correspond. When asked if it would matter if this were not the case, she responded that it would:

> I feel it's very important to have that match because otherwise I'll be living a lie or practising in a world going to work and then pretending.

For Jess, a gap between personal and professional values would be a matter of deceit, bringing us to the opposite end of the continuum from Annie. There, separation between personal and professional values was valued and protected, to enable Annie to manage a role in which she could not respond to service users in the way in which she could wish. Here, a 'match' between the two is an ethical imperative.

8.2 Super-ordinate theme 2: Attending to others

The two group themes which comprise this super-ordinate theme show participants making different sorts of sense of the ethical considerations which underpin responses to service users. Its name carries meanings of both paying attention and attending practically, intended to convey that attention towards service users finds its expression not simply in what participants think and feel, but in the practice it informs.

8.2.1 Regard for individuals: 'Putting the service user first'

This group theme has two elements, which will be addressed in turn. In the first, participants talk about regard/disregard as reflecting respect for individuals and the choices they make. Second, they articulate it in terms of attention paid to individual circumstances and particularities.

Participants convey respect for service users with a variety of emphasis but a consistent focus on practice rather than principle. One perspective is that it is a means to facilitate partnership, expressed here by Annie:

> …respect, I am sure every person, every culture, every ethnicity, every country tries to hammer home respect, yeah, we have that at home as well (…) I try to practise that, respecting other people, working in harmony with them.

Here, respect underpins harmonious practice. Annie beats rhythmically on her chest with her fist as she says 'hammer home respect' to amplify her point, also echoing the practical understanding of the 'tools' of practice which we saw in *Minding the gap* above. True partnership is not necessarily easy to achieve. Chloe, criticising colleagues for not confronting a service user's drinking, says that in her view 'a therapeutic relationship is based on trust and honesty and mutual respect'. Partnership based on respect includes recognising service users' capacity for difficult conversations.

Participants give many examples of respect being demonstrated by supporting service user choice. Katrina recounts an example of setting up a service user forum to engender a frank exchange of views between staff and young people 'because we respected them and they respected us'. Here, respect necessitates proactive engagement in creating opportunities for choice to be expressed. Without these, choice may be denied. Staying with Katrina, we hear about an older woman being denied choice twice, after a stroke left her with limited hearing and no speech. First, her husband made the decision to throw away her hearing aids, apparently on the basis that as she could not join a conversation verbally she no longer needed them. Second, her GP failed to investigate the help his patient wanted.

> [her husband] said, she hasn't had [hearing aids] for two years, I threw them away because she couldn't talk to me. I was like, that's not your choice, she needs to have her hearing aids if she wants, someone then asked her if she wanted them back and she said she did. But that could have been realised a long time before but it wasn't. But just by asking her whether she wanted them she could say yes she did and she wanted to go through the whole process to get them, which was fine but her GP never spoke to her to find out if there were any complaints and she could've had something wrong with her. She could have been in pain but he never asked her.

This service user's right to choose was disregarded by first by her husband's controlling action, and then by the GP taking no action at all. From a professional perspective, this scenario raises other troubling questions about the vulnerability of a woman physically dependent on others and rendered unable to communicate. At

a basic level, however, Katrina recognises that both commission and omission may bring about harm, although she highlights what this means for the individual, rather than the structural marginalisation of people affected by age and frailty.

Mary brings the further perspective on choice of cultural difference:

> A nurse from another culture might say …'You'll take your medication now', but what they mean is, 'Would you like to come and take your medication?' But it's their communication style…it's not that they're not allowing autonomy and self-determination, it's more just about their communication. I might say, 'Would you like to come now and we can give you your medication? Would you like some water?' I think in my culture we, kind of like, fill our conversation with a lot of unnecessary things whereas other cultures might be a lot more direct.

Mary's assumption here that she knows what the nurse means, beyond the words she uses, may suggest that she is unable or unwilling to accept a colleague as simply not valuing service user choice. Equally, a further point for consideration might be the value placed on choice by colleagues who are not social workers and/or not (like Mary herself) White British. Nonetheless, Mary raises here the issue of how language can either conceal a choice that is there to be made, or suggest that it is there when it is not, leading to possible confusion for both service users and colleagues.

Once voiced, service user choice may raise further ethical challenges for the practitioner. Chloe says:

> It can be difficult… dealing with people that you just think 'you're really making bad choices… you're not responsible enough or you know, if you went down this road, did this, this and this' but … I know you can't tell people things like that, they have to want to do it for themselves (…) but it won't stop me from...working with people and finding routes with them.

Here, maintaining respect requires both self-management and creativity, holding back a critical response while identifying new 'routes' in partnership. Grace articulates this further:

> I wouldn't impose my values on somebody else and if I talk to a service user, of course I wouldn't literally say 'well, I would do this' (…) it'll be interesting to hear where they're coming from and what their values are and how I could support them using their values.

Again, there is a sense here of ethically informed practice needing effort, perhaps at the cost of personal expression on the part of the professional. Here, this group theme complements 'Minding the gap' as each includes examples of participants talking about managing their own responses to what services users do. The earlier theme saw this through the lens of awareness of the self as a social worker in the making. Here, the perspective is that the service user's autonomy is intrinsically worthy of recognition.

Sometimes, respect for service user choice is limited or compromised by other ethical drivers. We saw above, in 'Minding the gap', that Teresa experienced 'ethical difficulty' in an adult safeguarding case. The further details she provides about this situation contribute to the present theme. Teresa explains that, in this case, upholding a service user's right to choose appeared counter to her best interests, as she wanted to give a large sum of money away to her (possibly avaricious) mother:

> I remember the daughter saying 'oh I want to give my mum so much'. Now she wanted to give her a lot of money… that was all her savings, and I'm thinking you're not thinking of the future at all you know (…) and the mother is like 'yes, yes, yes, give me the money'.

Teresa's cajoling tone here, when she spoke the mother's words, accompanied by grasping hand movements, made her own perceptions about the mother's intentions clear. Whether or not these were justified, for Teresa, putting the service user's 'wellbeing' first means encouraging her to make a choice different to her initial inclination, which eventually she did. The principle of respect for choice was tempered by other considerations, here the risk of possible exploitation, with a sense of a hierarchy of principles being brought to bear.

Respecting service users' choice may also mean, on occasion, accepting that people do not wish to engage, as Jess points out:

> My values are from my upbringing, I respect people regardless of where they come from (…) I can help anybody, anywhere as

> long as they allow me to, I can help them, support them in any way.

Again, Jess' 'accommodating' perspective is explicitly contextualised in her family background, but with the recognition that some people may choose not to be accommodated. This may also be the case where service users appear not to wish to receive services from a particular individual. Grace gives an example of an older woman referring to her 'by the n word'. Her response was:

> I literally just said 'do you know, we don't use that term anymore, you can refer me to as a black person or call me Grace' … and that was it (…) she called me 'Darling' from then onwards!

Here, as elsewhere in her interview, Grace talks about responding to racism by seeking to educate others about the evolving use of language. Similarly, she speaks of educating her mother whose Christian views, Grace says, include intolerance towards same sex relationships. Nevertheless, it seems that the principle of respecting service user choice does not extend to their choosing to be discriminatory: here service user's values, not the participant's, are under consideration.

Finally, Mary contributes the perspective of the importance of service user choice being properly informed. Talking about her work with a man experiencing psychosis, she says:

> So I wonder, is it really ethical of me as a student to be interviewing this person? Because they might have the capacity to consent to an initial assessment but they might not understand that I'm not a qualified professional …but I still did an observation [for my portfolio] on him and I think was that ethical? I'm not really sure because actually he's quite vulnerable and might even be, kind of, exploited in that sense of I'm using [the interview] to get past my training and he's obviously very psychotic.

Mary suggests here that her own need to have her practice observed may have meant that she 'still' went ahead with an assessment despite the service user's condition and its implications for his capacity to choose. This suggests that being a student may present an ethical challenge in itself, if the need to demonstrate and evidence skills conflicts with service users' best interests.

The second facet to this theme conceptualises regard, in both a metaphorical and a literal sense, as attention to the particular details of people's lives. Barbara explains the importance of paying attention to the systems within which service users live:

> It's important to think of a person, not just in one context but to look at everything else that contributes to that person's wellbeing … obviously education is an important part [of a child's life] but then there's other things that contribute to that education … if the family home is not stable, then obviously their education will suffer or … if the community in which they live is, is not supporting them well enough then obviously the education would suffer so it's not just looking at one aspect.

Here, as well as in other instances in her interview, Barbara conveys her understanding that people exist in dynamic, interrelated networks, with effective intervention requiring a holistic perspective. Attention may also be based on listening. Teresa suggests that what is heard informs what is understood:

> I love a good old story…[social work is] about listening to people and listening to a good old story… being able to work with the individual and seeing them for who they are. They are a human being who deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, and I would want to be treated with respect and dignity.

For Teresa, close attention to a service user privileges both their individuality and the humanity she shares with them. She goes on to talk about the importance of recognising people in terms not only of deficiency but capability, on the basis that 'there's a lot more about life than what one cannot do'. She contrasts this perspective with the medical model that she sees as ultimately limiting and emphasising negativity. This perspective features in other examples of service users being overlooked in mental health services, including being talked over, denied eye contact or treated solely with reference to their diagnosis. Barbara, for example, describing accompanying a service user to a hospital appointment, talks about:

> The way [medical staff] carry on and talk about someone without even referring to them when they're in the room, without even addressing them directly…I found it really difficult to advocate for [the service user] but then the second time I just thought, 'no, I need to take my place and

> advocate and say 'can you speak to her directly, she's understanding everything you're saying'.

Here Barbara's language suggests that she too may have been overlooked, having no 'place' in the room until she 'took' it. There is a sense too that she needed to take herself in hand, her values perhaps dictating what she knew to be the right thing to do for the service user. Chloe recounts similar experiences of an 'oppressive' ward round she 'absolutely hated…like a conveyor belt of people', and talks about home visits with community psychiatric nursing colleagues:

> … I felt like it was, 'hello [service user], how you doing? Right, bend over, injection, see you next week'.

The intimations of dehumanisation here, with service users barely being given eye contact, are also evident in Mary's account of her experiences of locked wards:

> They have glass fronted offices for observation and I think it's just a really old school idea to have your staff sitting behind glass chatting about service users, watching them…I just find that really horrific and not very therapeutic at all and I'm sure there's better ways to observe than to sit behind glass as if you're in a zoo.

Here, patients are portrayed as being observed but not truly seen as human beings. Both examples convey a sense of people given attention of the wrong sort, which sees them as a homogenous group of patients while disregarding their individuality. Chloe goes on to contrast this approach with experiences in her contact with social workers:

> Going out with the social worker that's not giving injections, you haven't got that agenda … so you're more inclined to ask [service users] how things are and what's going on.

This suggests that for Chloe a defining characteristic of her chosen profession is its commitment to recognising the individual. There is also a sense that attention to the body gets in the way of attention to the person, raising the question of where personhood resides – and equally whether the social work agenda is truly, as implied here, more person-centred than other professions'.

Each of the five Black African participants in this sample talks about disregard on the basis of ethnic identity. These contributions vary in their emphasis, but all link personal experiences with wanting not to discriminate against others. Barbara mentions what she has learnt about diversity since coming from Africa to England. Asked to expand, she talks about her first awareness of being perceived as different, using halting tones and hesitant language which suggest that she this is something she is still trying to make sense of:

> Where I grew up, my family were quite well off enough to send me to a multi-racial school and I never felt the difference between black and white but when I came to this country, I certainly felt it, so that was a learning for me but – and, and at some point you kind of feel, you kind of … you kind of feel not, not hate or resentment but I kind of felt like 'oh dear', you know, I feel very different.

For Barbara, helped by her experience to 'understand and celebrate the difference in people', the emphasis is on the recognition of individuality. She extends this to people engaging in same sex relationships, saying that while her faith had taught her that this was wrong, she has since decided that people have the right to make their own decisions about their lives. Another perspective on diversity is on similarity, rather than difference. Annie conveys a sense of the essential humanity and failings of all, black or white. Having given examples of facing racism herself, she goes on to say that she herself tries 'to be fair… whatever colour, whatever ethnicity, I try to, I try' and develops the point further:

> There are some people would say black people smell - everybody smells, I get on the bus, sometimes people would be smelling of dandruff, the person sat in front of me is white and where's the black man who smell? They are not there, it's the white person forgot to have their bath, bless them!

Here, difference and sameness are opposite sides of the same coin: recognising what makes people individual is parallel with seeing their humanity. A third response to discrimination is to understand it less as a response to being black but more to simply being different. Jess describes her unwelcoming reception on arriving in England - 'the country is cold and the people are cold, nobody would say hello how are you'. She goes on to express her widening understanding that discrimination 'is not only about race, it's also about other aspects in our lives – age, sexuality, gender, all other aspects', concluding:

> …social work is about individualism. Take people as individuals, do not say because a person is like this everybody else is like that, don't generalise people's circumstances…that's one thing which has stood out for me and reflection, just self-reflection…maybe I'm going into a Muslim's family and straight away I'm thinking oh they will do this, they will do that. No, no, no. Go into someone's house with an open mind…and then when you see those things clicking in, reflect on self.

Here, Jess' acceptance of her own capacity to discriminate leads her to identify reflection as the key tool to enable her to recognise and address this. Again, as illustrated by Barbara's experience of supervision in 'Minding the gap', reflection is experienced as an ethical endeavour, facilitating the self-awareness to work with others without imposing personal bias. Overall, for these black participants their own experiences of racism provide raw material informing their ethical standpoint with regard to others. In this capacity, they are all experts by experience, with this theme echoing 'Ethical commitment' above where personal history played a part in participants' social work ambitions. That is not to say that experience of discrimination necessarily leads to anti-discriminatory principles being consistently applied: we saw above that Jess seemed to regard anyone who was an only child as ethically unsuited to social work. Nor is it to argue that white people may not face discrimination too, for a range of reasons, although none of the white participants in this sample mentioned or described it.

Finally, paying attention as an ethically informed practitioner includes paying heed to service users' immediate practical needs. Mary and Katrina give instances of other professionals seeming not to grasp the gravity of situations both describe as 'awful':

> Mary: There were cat faeces and urine everywhere and [the service user] hadn't eaten but she was quite catatonic, very unresponsive. I don't think she even knew I was there and then we just left and it was a really horrible situation because when the worker said, 'Have you had lunch?' she said, 'No'. So I thought we were going to help her to make lunch because she obviously couldn't do it herself, but it was just like, 'Alright, see ya'. It was really awful actually and I did raise it as a concern.
>
> Katrina: [The service user's] toenails were growing really long and growing back on themselves… I spoke to her doctor and he said he'd make a referral, but he didn't make it. So then I kept chasing him … he didn't seem to care about the fact that her nails were growing back on themselves anyway and she was in a lot of pain, for a lady that can barely stand, it's just awful.

The first of these extracts contrasts Mary's desire to help with the care worker's lack of agency. Frustration at a lack of action by others is significant elsewhere in Mary's interview, where she cites ward staff not following up missed appointments and failing to interact with patients. There is a sense too that being aware of a service user's need imposes a moral responsibility to act; the carer's parting words to the service user appear ironic in that she appears not to have seen her needs at all. In the second extract, a professional similarly appears to fail to grasp the significance of what is happening for a service user, while Katrina's repetition of 'growing' adds a sense of urgency, almost as if the nails are becoming more painful as she speaks. This example, showing attention to detail as not only informing intervention, but also

bringing the participant closer to a service user's experience, leads to the second theme.

8.2.2 Compassion: 'You take on their fears'

The name of this theme is intended to convey the ways in which participants talk about ethically-informed practice being informed by feeling for others' suffering. There is a spectrum here between empathy and being unable to feel for certain individuals at all.

One experience of compassion is its effect on the self. From this perspective, 'Compassion' is closely linked to 'Regard for individuals'. Attention generates compassion, which in turn makes continued attention inescapable, and so the themes are intertwined. For Jess, an emotional response to others starts with a focus on detail, which stays with her and has a personal impact. Talking about her work with a child born with profound impairments she says 'even now I can see the little child… [social work] is not just a job'. This raises the question of what social work is if it is not 'just a job' – and Jess goes on to suggest an answer:

> When you empathisise with people … with service users, you take on a lot. Sometimes you might not realise that you're taking on a lot on your shoulders. You go home with it, it just doesn't go because a few people can do that, maybe over a glass of wine but to those people who don't drink or see reality as reality like myself, things like that don't just die. Then those are things which push me to say, okay I really need to do something for these parents and the children.

For Jess, it seems that social work entails taking on the burden of others' suffering, but only for those with the clarity to see the role for what it really is. Clear here is the role of empathy as a spur to action, although this is not without its cost: Jess goes on to note the 'baggage' she continues to carry for each of her service users and says elsewhere 'you take on their fears and they become yours'. This is redolent of her repeated use of the word 'passion' earlier in her interview, talking about her drive to become a social worker; given her Christian faith, it perhaps carries the additional sense of suffering. Again, this highlights the difference between Jess' view of social work and participants' who favour a more compartmentalised approach.

Compassion may also involve participants drawing on understanding gleaned from experiences in their personal lives to feel for actual or putative service users. Grace gives an example of her work with a young person facing homelessness:

> When I worked in one of the hostels, I was able to relate to the young person and understand their problems, I was able to empathise with them, especially being young myself (…) I understood them, they understood me and I was able to help them move from one step to another.

For Grace, her own identity and experiences as a young person facilitate understanding and effective intervention. This reciprocity echoes Katrina – 'we respected them and they respected us'. Barbara feels not for a particular service user but black service users in general when she describes her response to her

practice educator's acknowledged preconceptions that a black student's work would not be 'up to scratch':

> I felt really … [sighs] … saddened …the fact that she just already had kind of, you know, written me off… I just thought … well, what about for service users that probably won't have a voice or won't have the opportunity to- to show themselves, you know, prove themselves otherwise?

The example was a positive one in that the practice educator went on to recount how Barbara had helped change her views, but nevertheless disappointing for Barbara, leading her to feel for the powerlessness service users may experience. This intimation of impotence brings us to the next perspective on compassion, in which it seems that the concerns participants express with regard to service users' feelings may reflect their own. Chloe could be speaking of her own experience when she empathises with a patient 'talked over' in a 'chaotic' ward round: 'too many questions, firing questions, difficulty in understanding what the psychiatrist was saying'. Mary makes the parallel explicit when she talks about a psychiatric ward:

> I'd go in [to the ward] and no-one would be responsive to me. So I'd come in and I didn't have a name badge and was just let straight onto the ward which you just think this could be anyone, but the staff wouldn't even look at you and I'm thinking, if I was here 24/7 I'd be actually feeling really crap.

Here Mary extrapolates directly from her own experience to service users being deemed not worth a response, or protection from 'anyone' who might enter the

ward. Again, and in the wider context of what Mary has to say in her interview about the medical model, there may be implied criticism here of health professionals in comparison with social workers. This is evident too in Annie's example of an inter-professional meeting in which a service user's carer was told in blunt terms that the service user did not have long to live. Annie found this insensitive:

> Somebody might have a view of just bringing something straight across the table without wrapping it in sheep skin and just say if it's a wolf, it's a wolf but I would rather they wrapped it in sheepskin … it shows a sensitivity and I think it's better that way.

The wider background to this statement is that in Annie's work with this family her perception was that inter-professional colleagues – a teacher, GP and health visitor - were unresponsive to her attempts at collaboration because she was 'just a student'. It may be, then, that participants have a heightened ability to identify with service users and carers' vulnerability and powerlessness as this chimes with their own. We saw this earlier, in 'Regard for individuals', where the lack of regard a service user was perceived to receive appeared to echo Barbara's experience of trying to be heard as advocate. Again this shows the closeness between these two themes: participants' own experience of being disregarded may hone their sense of compassion for service users, overlooked too.

Another perspective is of compassion as a practical tool, consciously employed to facilitate ethically informed practice. Mary and Teresa both use the same familiar metaphor:

> Mary: I try and put myself in other people's shoes and think how did they get to that point or how might they be feeling?
> Teresa: I would want to be treated with respect and dignity, so like I said, I always take myself out of my shoes and put myself in that person's shoes and try to understand where they're coming, where they're going, and understand them, yeah.

Mary's tone is aspirational and tentative while Teresa speaks more emphatically, perhaps suggesting various levels of confidence about how far feeling as another does is achievable or desirable. A perspective voiced by Katrina is that it should be approached with caution:

> I'm patient, I'll listen to people, I'll think about them in their situation and sometimes I think, how would I feel but then I think, I shouldn't [think] about how I should feel. It's like how they're feeling.

This suggests that while empathy may provide a useful route to understanding, it needs to be held in check if it is not to shift attention away from service users' experience to one's own.

The final element of this theme is what participants have to say about of the limits of compassion, in examples of work with service users for whom they experience

limited sympathy. Here, this theme echoes ‘Mind the gap’. However, there the emphasis was on the strategies that participants employ to manage personal reactions alongside what they understand to be professional social work expectations. Now, it is on the responses that make this management necessary. In each case, the principle of respect provides the means by which work with the individual moves forward. Chloe struggles to feel for people who have religious faith – ‘religion for me is a big problem’ – and those whose spending habits she disagrees with:

> Going round to people’s houses when they’re on benefits and they’ve got massive tellies, big lots of debt, all that kind of thing, you just want to go, ‘this is so wrong’, you know, ‘you're not …’ but … you can’t, that’s, they’ve chosen that way.

The remedy here to an inability to feel compassion is suspension of judgment, arising out of respect for people’s choices. Where empathy fails, regard for the other – noted above as a more prevalent theme in the interviews - provides a way forward. This brings to mind Annie’s image earlier of respect as a means to promote harmonious working, suggesting that it may be a social worker’s most flexible and fundamental ethical tool.

8.3 Super-ordinate theme 3: The challenge of 'the system'

The final super-ordinate theme for the Year 3 sample captures the meanings for participants of ethics within administrative systems including hierarchies and inter-professional teams. It comprises two themes with the majority of the sample represented in just one or the other. Three individuals experience systems as broadly ethically constraining, and two find instead that they present ethical challenges that may nonetheless be negotiated by flexibility or creativity. Grace, Katrina and Mary – the three youngest students in the sample - are represented in both themes.

8.3.1 Tolerating ethical constraint*:* 'Everything has to be ticked'

Here, participants understand systems as presenting rigid administrative barriers, which sometimes prevent them doing what they might think ethically right for service users. They present experiences of these with varying degrees of acceptance. Annie, as noted in 'Becoming a social worker', recognises that organisational requirements for consistency in how different service users are treated prevent her from responding in line with her personal inclination. She goes on:

> There's nothing I can do… there's no way she's going to, to stay, she will be referred to Immigrations and then she will go home (…) That's the Social Services, now I'm part of it.

There is a sense of inevitability here. While Annie notes that this is not how she would 'prefer' things to be, the definitive repetition of 'she will…' suggests that any alternative is impossible. Moreover, while Annie notes in regretful tones that local authority and immigration service protocols are unbending, she does not convey any sense that they reflect global social injustice. Another perspective conveys barriers as more actively constructed. Chloe recounts a new mother being denied psychological intervention because of a policy that it is unsuitable for those who have recently given birth:

> [Psychologists] will always try to make and justify reasons why they can't take a patient on … you just come up with barriers because other professionals will say 'well we can't do that', you know, 'the threshold says...' or they're not eligible, well actually the service user says that's what she wants, so that's not putting the service user first in my opinion… it's kind of you hit walls.

The tone here, like Annie's, is rather fatalistic, suggesting that although these constraints may lead to suboptimal practice there is little to be done about them: 'barriers', 'threshold' and 'walls' convey an unresisting built edifice. Equally, when Chloe talks about managing competing drivers - her own opinion versus service user choice, the different priorities of children's and adult services – she has recourse to the respective strength of these considerations to inform her decision. For Chloe, therefore, rules and systems limit options but also provide clarity.

Chloe's examples are drawn from multi-disciplinary contexts, with an implication that social work offers a more flexible approach than medicine. Another perspective is of clear protocols as more of a defining feature of social work than of health professionals. Grace says:

> For example, removing a child we [social services] would have to go through all the courts and whatnot but then the health visitor may say, 'the child needs to be removed' and it's … and we have to go through the whole process and then the next child meeting will come and the health visitor will say, 'did it happen?', and then, then the social worker say 'it's a process' … if there are no strict guidelines, I think everything would be messy so for that reason, I think those guidelines do need to be there.

Elsewhere, Grace also talks about experiencing frustration and distress at the limitations these 'guidelines' impose in that they 'limit you as to what you can do', like Chloe suggesting ambivalence. Other participants express a similar sense of barriers as immoveable. Barbara notes in accepting tones that in statutory agencies 'there's the same form for everything (…) everything has to be ticked'. Nonetheless, she also relates experiences of practice that she perceives as counter to service users' wellbeing. In one example, she describes feeling 'awful' carrying out a statutory visit to a teenage girl, where adherence to required timescales meant that Barbara had not had the opportunity to meet her ahead of this formal encounter:

> I just wished the, the ground would open and swallow me! That's how I felt! That's exactly how I felt. I felt awful… I just felt 'my goodness, this social work, this is so not the sort of

> social work that I thought it would be' and, and how have I made her better? 'Cause that's what social work is about isn't it, trying to make things better for people? But I made it worse if anything.

Barbara goes on to express her hopes about the sort of social worker she wants to be:

> I just hope, I just hope, I just hope I can keep fighting. Because I- I had the opportunity to see that people have stopped fighting, some social workers have stopped fighting and they just do what needs to be done, very minimal and move onto the next case 'cause there's loads of cases to, to fight if you're gonna be fighting so I don't know, yeah, I just hope I'll, I'll have that fight.

As conveyed by Mary when talking about what initially attracted her to the profession, there is a sense here that for Barbara 'real' social work is about doing more than the 'minimal'. However, 'fighting' for Barbara seems to mean not circumventing or ignoring rules, but rather doing the best she can within them. Her words suggest that she is not entirely confident, having seen the realities of practice, that she will be able to continue to achieve this. She locates herself in an uncomfortable position: her repetition of 'felt' in the first extract leaves her distress in no doubt, and yet to cope with this by ceasing to fight is unpalatable. Just as Jess speaks of the 'baggage' she carries for each of her service users in *Compassion*, here Barbara similarly acknowledges the personal cost of ethically informed practice in having to maintain a 'fighting' stance.

Finally in this theme, participants talk about their experiences of ethical constraints inherent to the student role. Annie describes struggling to get information from a head teacher, she believes due her being seen as 'just a student'. Grace believes that an unannounced home visit would be in a child's best interests but has this suggestion rebuffed:

> I feel like sometimes at placement, being a student, not many people listen to you, or they literally brush you off because you're a student (…) They - they say that we've got a say but I think our say is fairly limited as a student, with that title of student on the top.

The experience conveyed here, of feeling ignored and dismissed, appears significant for this participant throughout her interview. In this extract, there is in additional sense Grace's lack of trust in the 'they' who suggest that students have a voice. This is amplified elsewhere, where Grace expresses fears that if what she says on placement is deemed inappropriate, she may fail. As in *Compassion* above, it seems that students' intrinsic vulnerability to being judged and found wanting may mean that there are similarities with some service users. Examples from other participants further contextualise the student role in inter-professional settings, reflecting real or perceived hierarchies in multi-disciplinary teams. Chloe, as noted above, gives an example of the psychological input that a service user had requested being denied her, but feels unable to challenge the psychologist:

> You just have to take their word for it really … as a student, it's very difficult to challenge, you know in a team meeting environment, to say 'well, how do you know?' you know,

> you've got a psychologist sitting there that's qualified, been doing the job for years… it's very, very difficult.

Despite the importance Chloe places on being able to challenge service users themselves, as noted above in 'Regard for individuals', her being a student inhibits her ability to challenge other professionals. Paradoxically, then, it seems that the student role, while making a learner status explicit, also prevents Chloe from asking the very questions that might enable her to learn. Equally, and alone of the sample, Chloe talks of similar experiences in the classroom. Having noted the expectations of social work students that 'you will not be anti-discriminatory' she goes on to suggest that on some issues 'it's almost like you can't have an opinion' for fear of being seen as oppressive. It is noteworthy that she uses the same phrase – 'black and white' – to describe both the inflexibility of both referral protocols on placement and the ethical conduct espoused in class. There are intimations, perhaps, of Chloe wanting a middle ground, which being a student prevents her from exploring. If ethics, then, requires conscious reflection on the right and wrong course of action in a given set of circumstances, it appears that being a student may inhibit this process, and by extension the learning which may come from it.

Elsewhere a perceived lack of agency is also attributed to personal presentation. Katrina accounts for this in part in terms of others' perceptions of her, talking about being overlooked on placement 'I suppose because I was a student…'it's just Katrina, let's just not worry about her''. However, despite giving instances of intervening and advocating for service users, she also acknowledges herself to be insufficiently

proactive. Having given an example of challenging a lack of boundaries between staff and service users she concludes:

> I should have done it earlier. I should have maybe had more confidence instead of doubting myself and thinking, oh well maybe it's okay, everyone else seems to think it's all right, I should have just gone, no it's not all right and dealt with it quicker rather than leaving it umming and aahing and then going oh well actually, and being more assertive about it rather than just saying, well I thought I'd mention that this happened.

The self-concept conveyed here echoes Katrina's image of herself as lacking efficacy which she portrays in other incidents she recounts elsewhere, including in her earlier experiences of education. This raises the issue of the relationship between students' perception of themselves as people, including as learners in the past, and of themselves as social work students.

8.3.2 Negotiating ethical obstacles: 'Get around it, in a way'

In this theme students make sense of hierarchical systems as obstacles not to be accepted but overcome by various means to secure ethically correct courses of action. While the previous theme conveyed experiences of confronting rigidity, this is more about movement as students talk about their experiences of resisting or finding ways over or around potential constraints.

One strategy participants recount is simply voicing their concerns to qualified social work colleagues. Examples of this from Grace, also represented in the previous theme, include being asked to write a report, a task she found ethically unacceptable on the basis that she had not met the family in question. She goes on to explain that despite her disquiet she was compelled to complete the work:

> Me being a student again, I don't really have that much of a say because I'm at placement, I don't want them to stop my placement or anything so I felt like I had to do it… it may have looked like you know, I was just being an angry bird and, and I was just, you know, being a bit childish and a bit immature but it was, it's life we're talking about, someone's future.

This statement must be viewed with some caution given its wider context. Later in her interview Grace explains that she does not want to work in child protection after qualification due to its stress and busyness, suggesting that ethical discomfort may not have been the whole picture. Nonetheless, it raises again the issue of the ethical tension students may feel as they try to negotiate placement challenges while mindful of possible implications for their successful completion of their course. Another perspective is of the student role offering opportunities rather than constraints. This is illustrated by Teresa's example of working with a service user with autism, who she felt was being moved into residential provision without adequate time to decide whether it was the right place for him. Teresa asked the allocated social worker to explain the decision:

> I explained to her, 'listen, I'm a student so I don't know these processes, can you please explain these processes to me, but I don't think it's right, you know' (…) I kept all of that going

Here, Teresa makes a virtue of her student role by using the licence it gives her to explore and challenge decisions from a point of view of not knowing. Not only did she achieve the outcome she intended for the service user but also forged a strong working relationship with the practitioner concerned, concluding that 'sometimes it's good to be naïve'.

Other approaches to negotiating systems are less overt. Katrina, like Grace, describes the bureaucratic constraints that stop her doing what she might want to for individuals. However, a sense is discernible too of her achieving her ends by stealth in an example she gives of simply not mentioning a service user's name in supervision. This, she says, keeps a supervisor's attention away from the time she is taking to find the most suitable possible care home for him. Recounting this, Katrina expresses some disquiet:

> At the end [the supervisor] said, well he's happy isn't he, you've got there in the end, and sort of praised me for it, but before that it was kind of … 'right we need to get him moved, come on'. I was like yes I'm trying my hardest but … yes. So I did find it difficult and I suppose I tried to avoid conversations about him…I don't know if that's the right way to deal with it or not.

There may be implications for accountability here, and not just Katrina's. Her supervisor's praise may suggest that she was aware of precisely what Katrina was doing, but was content to let her carry on for the good of the service user, knowing that expected procedures might compromise what could be achieved.

Other approaches involve action rather than omission, making strategic use of power. Jess describes her experience of asylum systems as 'a nightmare place, a hell place' and 'all about power issues'. There is an implication here that for this participant, power can be intrinsically abusive and lead to oppressive practice for its own sake. This provides useful context for what she says about resource allocation in her placement, where she highlights the different perspectives of social workers and their managers:

> Because you're the person who goes and sees the families on a one to one basis, the manager makes a decision in the offices but because you know the strain, you feel oh you have to do your best but you are always thinking on your toes to say okay what's … how can I … out-think the manager.

Jess' solution here is to draw on others who know the family concerned to build a compelling argument for what she seeks for the service user, with a sense of her managing the manager by harnessing alternative sources of power. Similarly Mary, rather than making a referral herself, which she fears may be turned down, suggests it to a more hierarchically powerful medic, who then takes it forward. In another example, rather than simply sharing concerns about a service user verbally she incorporates them in case notes, necessitating follow-up by others:

> When I got back to the [team] office I was supposed to finish at 5:00pm and I actually ended up there for quite a bit longer writing up case notes and detailing exactly what it was that I saw so actually people couldn't deny the experience of this lady and that she needed extra support, because if it's down in the notes then it's logged that somebody has said something needs to happen. And actually I thought they might have been a bit annoyed at me because I wrote recommendations at the bottom to say, 'This person needs a medication review' … and I think they were a bit shirty with me about that. They were like 'a student social worker's come in and is saying all this and that and the other'.

Here, as in Jess' example, there is a sense that power dynamics within systems can be a means of leverage - albeit requiring acceptance of others' possible disgruntlement. In Mary's interview as a whole, the language she uses – 'getting round the system, in a sense', 'picking up' service users (as referrals) thinking 'along the way' rather than 'sitting back' – conveys a sense of movement, flexibility and energy rather than the rather inert and unimaginative approach she is frustrated by in others. The end of the Year 3 results thus echoes its beginning, with a participant's emphasis on agency and commitment as fundamental to ethically-informed social work practice.

This final results chapter has shown the Year 3 participants consolidating professional identity as they actively manage the interface between personal and professional values. Ethical orientation to other people is marked principally by respect, although emotional responses are keenly felt. Reflecting this emphasis on

individuals' choices and experiences, overt expressions of a social justice perspective are absent. All participants talk about the ethical challenges and opportunities inherent in being a student. Finally, for this group of participants, all having reached or nearing the end of a 100-day placement in a statutory setting, ethical understandings are rooted explicitly in the administrative systems in which they find themselves.

The end of this chapter concludes the account of the results of my study. Together, the three results chapters have presented ethics as participants made sense of it in their interviews and as I made sense of it in turn, in my analysis of the data. They portray ethics as a multi-faceted phenomenon, reflecting participants' personal history, encounters they have had with significant people, and their experiences in the course of social work education. In addition, the group and super-ordinate themes I developed in my analysis have suggested both commonalities across the three samples' understandings, but also differences between them. In the next chapter, I consider the results' significance in the context of the literature that I reviewed earlier in the thesis, and explore their relevance for qualifying social work education.

Chapter Nine: The discussion of the results: situating the study in the literature

Interpretative phenomenological analysis employs a 'double hermeneutic' whereby first participants make sense of their experience, and then the researcher makes sense of participants' sense-making (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.3, and see Chapter Five). Chapters Six, Seven and Eight have presented the fruits of this, reporting my own sense of how students at different stages of qualifying social work education understood ethics. Now the emphasis shifts outside the interpretative process, as having first noted the study's limitations, I contextualise its results in messages from the literature. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's contribution to knowledge about student understandings of ethics in the context of qualifying social work education, illustrated in a simple graphic.

9.1 Bringing the results together

The analyses of the three samples were conducted separately, to tease out the meaning of ethics for students in each of the three years of the undergraduate degree. In this chapter, I consider them together. This is not to create a theory of ethical development, which was not the aim of the study. Furthermore, any conclusions about the differences in understandings conveyed by participants at different stages of the social work degree are made cautiously, reflecting the implications of my small sample sizes. Nonetheless, social work education in England

is a structured and developmental process (see Chapter Two) and so it is necessary to address the results mindful of this if they are to be of practical use. This is especially so given that that I conducted my study in an applied discipline in which research reflects a wider commitment to social justice, and the use of knowledge to make a difference in people's lives (see Chapter Five). My results being translated into useful messages for educational practice matters not only for students, but ultimately for the service users who rely on social work support in difficult and often painful circumstances (see Chapter One).

A summary of the three sets of results, presenting the group and super-ordinate themes developed for each sample, is included here as a reference point for the reader.

Table 17: Summary of super-ordinate themes (in capitals) and group themes, all samples

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
ETHICAL ORIENTATION Ethical affinity: 'it has something to do with who I am' Scoping the ethical field: 'As long as you've got those pillars, then you should be all right' UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE Feeling for others: 'thinking about how other people feel in situations' Accepting the individual: 'everybody has different challenges'	THE WORTH OF SERVICE USERS Respect: 'in my mind I'm not judging them' Caring holistically: 'social workers worry more about the person as a whole' ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL WORK Feeling the fit: 'all the things I've done have brought me here' Ethical discomfort: 'maybe I care too much'	BECOMING A SOCIAL WORKER Ethical commitment: 'a lot of growth from where I started' Minding the gap: 'I wouldn't impose my values' ATTENDING TO OTHERS Regard for individuals: 'putting the service user first' Compassion: 'you take on their fears' THE CHALLENGE OF 'THE SYSTEM' Negotiating obstacles: 'get around it, in a sense' Tolerating ethical constraint: 'everything has to be ticked'

The interviews for each of the three samples drew on participants' experiences over the previous academic year, and so it is relevant to reiterate details of the University of Bedfordshire's undergraduate social work degree structure, as context for the chapter. When I collected my data, in summer 2014, the Y1 participants had completed a series of tasks designed to prepare them for practice learning the following year, including child observation and shadowing activities. The Y2 and Y3 students were nearing or had reached the end of their first [70 day] and last [100 day] placements respectively. All the Y2 students had been placed in voluntary

agencies, and the Y3s in local authority teams. Students' capabilities were assessed at each level against the relevant PCF descriptors (TCSW, 2012b, and see Chapter Two). This meant that Y3 students were required to engage in practice learning opportunities in which they could begin to contribute to the statutory tasks inherent in the social work role, including assessment, the use of authority and the management of risk (TCSW, 2012b).

Despite the differences in participants' responses within and between the three samples there were also broad commonalities, albeit with different emphases. A starting point for the study was that while ethics in social work was highly theorised and widely codified, less was known about individuals' understandings of it. Accordingly, first the information and consent materials for participants and then the interview guides, prompts and probes invited a focus on experience, rather than theoretical knowledge. Even so, it was striking how little explicit reference participants across the study made to ethical theory or formal professional standards, given that each was nearing the end of an academic year of teaching and assessment. Instead, they conveyed ethics as shifting, dynamic, and situated; not something applied to learning and practice but arising within it. Together, the results of the three analyses suggest a configuration of ethical understandings in three overlapping relational domains. In order of overall prevalence, these concern participants' relationships with first, social work itself, second, service users, and finally, organisations. I return to these domains later in this chapter, when I identify messages for social work education in each. Meanwhile, they provide structure for this discussion of the results in relation to the literature.

9.2 Relating to social work

Qualifying UK social work education aims to equip students to apply successfully for professional registration, in England currently with the HCPC, which permits designation by the title of social worker (HCPC, no date). Accordingly, social work educators are tasked to equip students not only with knowledge and skills, but also a grasp of the professional identity they are hoping to acquire. There is broad agreement that professional identities include ethics and values (see Chapter One). Given this, it is unremarkable that for every participant in the study, concerns with the relationship between their own values and those of social work featured in what they had to say about ethics. Here, while the study broadly concurs with other research (for example Christie and Kruk, 1998; Miller, 2013; Wiles, 2013), its contribution lies in offering insight into contemporary experience, in the English context, of this process of ethical orientation and identification with the profession. This part of the discussion is structured in four sections. First, I address participants' understandings of the nature and scope of ethics in social work practice. Second, I explore insights from the study into the interface between professional and personal identities and values, at different stages of social work education. Third, I consider how participants spoke about ethical issues inherent in their transitional identities as students, committed to their profession but not yet qualified practitioners. Finally, I conclude my exploration of this domain of ethics by stepping outside my empirical findings to consider participants' relationship with social work through the theoretical lens of virtue ethics.

9.2.1 Identifying social work ethics and values: their nature and scope

In the analysis of each sample participants spoke positively about the values they saw demonstrated in practice and that they wanted to emulate. Some conveyed this with reference to social workers as positive role models, whether encountered personally or professionally. For example, Balikis (Y1)'s role model turned a life around, Pauline (Y2)'s brought order out of a 'shambles'; Mary (Y3)'s regularly worked for service users beyond office hours. Here, the study echoes others that similarly noted role models as important in shaping students' motivations (Singletary, 2006; Warde, 2009; Wilson and McCrystal, 2007). Participants across the samples also characterised social work's ethical stance as preferable to other professions'. For example, Francesca (Y1), Mavis (Y2) and Barbara (Y3) all commended social work's holistic approach to service user's circumstances. Echoing Wiles (2013), this conveys a sense of these participants regarding social work as distinctive not by virtue of the ethical issues with which it is permeated (see Chapter One) but because its practitioners are ethically exemplary. My own experience of over a decade marking social work students' assignments bears this out, as I have read many assumptions, explicit and implied, of social workers' ethical superiority over other professionals. There are uncomfortable intimations here of Reamer's 'morality period' in the evolution of social work ethics (Reamer, 2013, p.5) except that here it is not service users who are found morally wanting, but other professionals. This is an important point in the current UK context, given the growing emphasis on inter-professional partnership in all areas of social work practice (see Chapter One). If social work students consider their own profession to have

possession of a high moral ground, this may not facilitate either honest reflection or the inter-professional collaboration that Csikai (2004) argues may in itself be ethically useful. In addition, the literature suggests that individuals' perception of social work as ethically good may mean that they struggle when confronted by a less positive reality, with implications for resilience (Ngai and Chung, 2009; Han and Chow, 2010). Perhaps a more helpful starting point for students is not that social work's ethical perspective is intrinsically preferable to others, but rather that for social workers, because of the ethical issues inherent in their role (see Chapter One), ethical understanding is especially important.

Alongside these examples of ethical exemplars and excellence, participants also spoke about their understandings that ethics in practice might be complex and potentially difficult, with different emphases in each sample. For the Y1 participants, ethical expectations were solid - Francesca's 'pillars', for example, and Jane's 'vital platform' - but allowed some flexibility. At first glance this apparent paradox may seem to support inferences of first-year students' limited understanding (Woodward and Mackay, 2012). However, on closer scrutiny, participants' words suggest the two senses of ethics noted in Chapter One: both the formal expectations represented in codes and frameworks, and the reflective process by which personal understandings are refined. A corollary of this is that the Y1 participants did not convey ethics purely as something to be learnt about, but rather as requiring their active and possibly challenging engagement. Y2 participants spoke similarly of ethics as fundamental to social work practice but here two further dimensions emerged, suggesting together that some of the ethical complexity anticipated by the Y1 participants was realised.

First, they talked about the ethical significance of the boundaries between their personal and professional selves. The literature similarly notes students' recognition of the necessity of boundaries for ethically sound practice (for example Williams and Reeves, 2004; Lindsey 2005; Wiles 2013). In my study, as well as acknowledging the importance of boundaries, participants spoke of finding them potentially problematic, preventing them doing what they would wish to for service users. For Pauline, they precluded her giving money to an impoverished young man; for Sarah they were counter to her predisposition to hug people in distress. Y2 participants' ethical understanding also extended to the recognition of the potential for social workers, and other professionals, to do harm. Generally, they located this not in individual practitioners but rather in organisational policies and procedures, which they perceived not to operate in service users' best interests. Examples included a young suicidal woman deemed insufficiently in need to be housed (Sarah) and children apparently disregarded by their local authority social workers once they had been referred on elsewhere (Linda). From a theoretical perspective, in Beauchamp and Childress' terms (1979, cited in Ferber, 2013) it was as if experiences of practice made the possibility of maleficence a reality, and so non-maleficence an ethical imperative. There was also discernible here an ambivalence towards professionalism, with intimations of the very impulse that had brought participants to social work, to make a positive difference to others' lives, contrasting with the realities of practice.

The Y3 participants spoke about social work ethics with the greatest clarity and confidence. Given that these students were nearing the end of three years academic

and practice learning this is unsurprising, and reflects the incremental expectations underpinning the design of undergraduate qualifying social work education (see Chapter Two). However, there were also examples of Y3 participants voicing practice issues as potentially ethically troubling but then redefining them. This tendency was not unique to final year students. Balikis (Y1), for example, described coming to understand surveillance cameras as ethically acceptable, once a practitioner explained the rationale for their use in evidence-based assessment practice. Similarly, Mavis (Y2) accepted with hindsight that evicting a young man from a hostel was justifiable as it spurred him on to greater independence, as well as reflecting the organisation's practice of short-term support. However, such instances were more prevalent in Y3. For example, Barbara spoke about her realisation that paperwork, although it kept her away from service users, was an essential part of practice; Annie and Chloe accepted the limitations imposed by eligibility criteria. In the literature, it is qualified participants who show this narrowing ethical gaze as a resolution to ethical disquiet (Kugelman, 1992; Boland, 2006; Fenton, 2015). In my study, participants who were still students appeared to be adopting a similar strategy. This is not to say that students do not need to recognise that the realities of practice may affect what they would like to do for service users were resources limitless. What is potentially troubling is their managing this in part by rationalising certain issues not as enduring ethical challenges, but not as ethical matters at all. This highlights the significance of the implicit as well as overt curricula in socialising individuals into the social work profession (Miller, 2013). This is especially so as contemporary contexts for practice are widely theorised as neoliberal and accordingly counter to traditional social work values (see Chapter Two). If this is so, and these contexts are shaping the

limits of what students understand the scope of ethics to be before the point of qualification, the social workers of the future may have ethical perspectives different from those hitherto regarded as characteristic of the profession. With Papouli (2016) this underlines the importance for educators of recognising that practice learning is not only where classroom learning about ethics is applied, but also a site of ethics education and professional acculturation in itself. Furthermore, it has implications for the significance of supervision. The literature suggested that supervision was a potential source of support with ethical issues for students and qualified practitioners alike (McAuliffe and Sudbery, 2005; Levy, Shlomo and Itzhaky, 2014; Hair, 2015). However, this raises the question of what happens in supervisory sessions and what form the support takes. On the one hand, supervision may be key to students retaining an ethical sensibility not determined by prevalent regimes but recognising both the individual and structural concerns that characterise the social work perspective (see Chapter Two). On the other, it may also be part of the process by which troubling situations are redefined, and students' ethical reach narrowed accordingly.

9.2.2 Personal and professional identities and values

Throughout the data, there were examples of participants speaking about their values in relation to how these mirrored or differed from those expected of the social worker they wanted to become. There were different emphases across the

year groups. The Y1 participants displayed a potentially paradoxical and vulnerable position, largely identifying with social work values while anticipating change and challenge ahead. Participants in Y2 expressed greater ethical disquiet, as noted above, conveying a sense of their wondering if social work was, after all, the profession for them. Evident from those nearest to qualification, in Y3, was that while each had developed a stance ethically acceptable to herself, this did not necessarily represent personal and professional ethical unification. Instead, the range of positions included Annie's cheerful assertion of 'the right tools for the right place', Grace's recognition that personal values must not be imposed on others, and Jess' insistence that anything less than personal and professional uniformity was dishonest.

In the literature, quantitative US studies with student participants tend to present the personal and professional value interface in terms of participants' compliance or not with professional expectations (for example Hancock, Waites and Kledaras, 2012; Lennon-Dearing and Delavega, 2015). Osteen (2011) offers a more nuanced, qualitative picture in his non-linear model featuring interrelated components of motivation, evaluation and negotiation, and integration. The messages from my participants, summarised above, are broadly consistent with these. However, Osteen interviewed students from across a postgraduate programme with their contributions not differentiated in terms of year group, and so my study adds insight into specific ethical concerns for participants at different stages of their social work education. Ethnicity may also be pertinent. It was striking that the minority ethnic – here, all black African – students were the most explicit about having different

identities, and applying different values, at home and in their practice. This demographic picture was not clear-cut, as the participant most insistent on the importance of personal and professional value consistency was also black African (Jess). Furthermore, participants who described holding contradictory personal and professional values gave examples of changes to their values while on the course (see the fourth point, below) suggesting a shifting interface. Nevertheless, the preponderant flavour of minority ethnic students' accounts of their values was of differences between those they had grown up with and those expected of social workers in England. In particular, they noted that in England, social work values placed a greater emphasis than their own culture on service users as autonomous individuals, echoing the internationally varied constructions of social work values noted in Chapter Two. In the literature, minority ethnic students described troubling experiences of managing these differences (Chung, 2006; Calderwood *et al.* 2009). Participants in my study did not share these. Rather, managing different values seemed simply another aspect for them of adapting to life in a new country. Illustrating this, they gave ready examples of their wider experiences of contrasts between their own and English culture. For example, Francesca (Y1) compared African and UK childhoods; Pauline (Y2) recalled that in Africa, unlike in England, 'those who do not work will not eat'; Jess (Y3) described her first experiences of English social reserve as unfamiliar coldness. This reinforces the message from the literature that while ethnicity may be significant it is variously so, and hence the importance of making sense of it mindful of students' particular circumstances (Czikai and Rozensky, 1997; Limb and Organista, 2003; Limb and Organista, 2006; Miller, 2013). With Osteen (2011, p.438), it suggests that while part of each

student's 'contextual lens', ethnicity must be understood in the light of local and personal circumstances. For seven out of my nine black African participants, these included their having spent at least some of their childhood or early life outside the UK, so adjusting to English life after an upbringing elsewhere. My findings also challenge conclusions about enduring tensions between students' personal and professional values (Wiles, 2013). If the ready acceptance of personal and professional value differences evident for some participants in the study is prevalent more widely, ethical development may be less a matter of integration versus non-compliance, and more of management.

A specific perspective on personal values is in relation to participants' spirituality. Again, messages from the literature here are mixed. Qualitative studies investigating the relationship between spiritual or religious values and those expected of social workers generally found that participants themselves tended to describe the two as mutually enriching (Singletary *et al.* 2006; Holden, 2012; Chappell-Deckert and Canda, 2016). Quantitative, survey-based studies conveyed a less clear account of congruence (Landau, 1999; Johnson *et al.* 2006; Prior and Quinn, 2012; Valutis, Rubin and Bell, 2014). In my study, with one exception (Teresa, Y3) the participants who had identified themselves as having a faith background tended to say little about or minimise its impact on their developing practice (for example Amy, Y1; Pauline, Y2; Mary, Y3). This may reflect the study's UK setting, given the other research cited here being from the US, and the secularisation of UK social work noted in Chapter Two. Nonetheless, participants identified one issue as presenting a source of conflicting values in relation to faith: sexuality. Jess, uniquely amongst the

study's participants, noted that the tolerance she had learnt from Christianity and her family values extended to gay people. However, eight of the twelve participants who identified as Christian, including seven of the nine black African students in the study, said that the Christian faith of their upbringing had taught them that same sex relationships were wrong. Their responses to this varied. Amy (Y1), Barbara (Y2) and Teresa (Y3) simply described having come to think differently, and no longer holding these views. Others said rather that they had come to accept having same sex relationships as a choice some people made. Thus, while some participants reached ethical accommodation with such choices by means of the principle of not judging, and of individuals' right to choose, this did not necessarily equate to personal approval. A corollary of this is that for these students, attitudes towards sexuality represented an enduring and inevitable difference between their personal and professional values. Lennon-Dearing and Delavega (2015) found that US students struggled more with diverse sexualities than did qualified practitioners. If this is true in England, then these participants' views may be ameliorated by experience. Even so, the attitudes expressed may raise concerns for English social work educators given the ethnically diverse social work workforce on the one hand, and social work's emphasis on the acceptance of difference on the other.

The study also casts light on participants' experiences of the changes in their values while on their social work course. There is a paradoxical element to this. On the one hand, there were many references across the data to social work as a natural or even inevitable career choice for participants, arising out of their character or experiences (for example Balikis, Y1; Linda, Y2; Grace, Y3). On the other, most

participants also gave examples of having changed during their course in ways that affected their personal lives. For example, Francesca (Y1) described having become less judgmental; Mavis (Y2) acknowledged being more ready than before to relinquish unsatisfying relationships; Teresa (Y3) recounted having become a more relaxed parent. These changes are expressed largely in positive terms, echoing Osteen's participant (Osteen, 2011, p.433) who said that her social work education had made her 'a better me'. Equally, they support contentions of the transformative potential of adult learning (see Chapter One) and concur with studies that highlighted discernible ethics development after educational input (for example Juujärvi, 2006; Van Voorhis and Hostetter, 2006; Grady *et al.* 2008; Woodward and MacKay, 2012). However, with Hughes (2011) and Wiles (2013), the study also found change not invariably experienced as easy, and that friends and family did not always welcome the unfamiliar values they heard expressed. Grace (Y3), for example, spoke of losing friends, and her sense of humour, in tones of regret. In addition, it appeared that for some participants, awareness of personal change meant that they came to view their past selves through a different, and more critical, lens. For example, Amy (Y1) spoke about being ashamed of her past intolerance of a friend with mental illness, and Jane (Y1) of wishing she had challenged oppressive behaviour she witnessed more vehemently than she did. Thus the study suggests that transformation through education may lead not only to change while on the course, with more anticipated, but to a reappraisal of the self which looks backwards as well as forward. These suggestions are made with caution, as the study was not intended to offer longitudinal insights, but nonetheless participants' own words suggest their perceptions of a process of change. They permit inferences that

discomfort may be an essential element for some students of the process of becoming a professional social worker, with something of their previous selves lost along the way. Here, the study concurs with others that suggest that the ethical awareness education imparts may generate stress or doubt (Van Soest, 1996; Ulrich *et al.* 2007; DiFranks *et al.* 2008). If this is the case, then both students themselves, and those supervising their learning, may need support with this potentially troubling element of professional socialisation.

9.2.3 Being a student

The second chapter of the literature review reported findings in existing empirical studies that being a student might in itself present ethical challenges. These included disagreements with practice supervisors (Dodd, 2007), disquiet at examples from them of practice that students deemed unethical (Papouli, 2016) or for fear of being viewed as naïve and possibly failing a placement (Bellefeuille and Hemingway, 2006). My study amplifies this picture. First, as in the literature, participants expressed their awareness of their limited power and knowledge, with particular reference to the difficulties this might present in challenging practice they deemed ethically unsatisfactory. This is especially striking in Y3 where, for example, Chloe and Grace spoke about their student role compounding difficulties in speaking up to colleagues while Annie described her requests for information, essential for a child's assessment, being disregarded. In each of these situations, despite their worries, the

student reported persevering in challenging nonetheless. This is an encouraging finding, although taken with the ethical recalibration noted above (see 9.2.1) might mean that while students may be ready to challenge, what they deem as requiring challenge will reflect their perception of what is an ethical issue. However, it seemed that in the classroom participants were less confident, sharing experiences of feeling fearful of voicing their personal values with regard to issues including ethnicity (Amy, Y1) and welfare benefits (Chloe, Y3). The terms in which participants expressed these examples implied both discomfort and also an awareness that their views did not fully conform to professional expectations, echoing Osteen (2011) and suggesting again Miller's (2013) implicit curriculum at work. It also raises further questions about respective socialisation processes on placement and in class, with the potential for different messages being received in the two settings. Insights from adult learning theory are relevant here (see Chapter One). The management of personal values expected of students by the end of their last placement (TCSW, 2012b) requires an awareness of what those values are. Can attitudes that are unvoiced be effectively explored and managed without the dialogue that Taylor (2009) notes is important for effective transformational learning? However, the study also raises the possibility that as well as challenges, the student role may present ethical opportunities. Implied, perhaps, in Osteen (2011)'s stages of development is that the liminal student role may offer greater ethical freedom than fully qualified status. Here, this was made explicit in Teresa (Y3)'s example, unique in the study, of intentionally employing her learner status in a service user's interests. Recounting its usefulness as a vehicle to ask questions of a practitioner, Teresa concluded that this proved an effective strategy to shift the previously recalcitrant

practitioner's perspective. Moreover, as well as Teresa (Y3) both Pauline (Y2) and Sarah (Y2) spoke of their sense that as students they did not yet quite have to adhere to the professional expectations that would apply once they are qualified. Recognition of this aspect of the student role may offer means to assist students to embrace their potential ethical agency, not only despite but also because of their unqualified status. Equally, it raises questions about the implications of 'fast track' routes to qualification (see Chapter Two) where students are also employees of the organisations in which they undertake their practice learning.

9.2.4 Theorising ethical identity: students as virtue ethicists

In this final section of this part of the discussion I consider how participants relate to their chosen profession from the perspective of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics is relevant here given its focus on personal development by means of the cultivation of desirable traits and habits (MacIntyre, 2013, and see Chapter Two). Asserting that personal character, rather than rules, religion or consequences, is primary in determining ethically sound actions, it emphasises that a virtuous character can be fostered with practice. Despite some theoretical interest, the virtue approach has received little overt attention in the empirically based social work literature. Some studies permit inferences of ethical disposition as inherent to the practitioner, regardless of outcome or circumstances (Holland and Kilpatrick, 1991; Brannelly, 2006; Danis *et al.* 2008). However, where virtue ethics is mentioned explicitly, there are mixed conclusions about its relevance (Osmo and Landau, 2006; Stanford, 2010;

Pullen-Sansfaçon, 2011). A contribution of my study is to suggest that virtue ethics may be consistent with the very process students are engaged in of becoming social workers, given the concerns with identity prevalent in the analyses. If this reflects a wider picture, social work students may inherently be proto virtue ethicists, with their concerns with character echoing those increasingly evident in professional ethical codes (Banks, 2012, and see Chapter Two). If this is so, it may be useful for educators to engage with this explicitly. This is not only in the interests of student-centred learning, but also so that the potentially dangerous assumptions theorised as underpinning a virtue approach (see Chapter Two) can be scrutinised and interrogated. This is all the more so given some participants' apparent perceptions noted above, of social work as inherently ethically superior to other professions.

9.3 Relating to service users

I now turn from participants' relationship and ethical identification with social work to their ethical responses to service users. This included not only the specific service users with whom they had worked, but also hypothetical service users of the future. Here I address first what participants had to say about their desires to help other people, and then the differing orientations of closeness and separation they articulated between themselves and others. I conclude this section of the discussion, like the last, by drawing on ethical theory included in Chapter 2. Here, my focus is on theory that locates ethics in relationships with other people, including Levinas' ethics of responsibility and other theorists' ethic of care.

9.3.1 Wanting to help

Talking about their motivations for embarking on a social work career, all participants spoke about wanting to help other people, and in doing so drew variously on their characteristics, upbringing and experiences. The picture of motivation was similarly multifarious in the literature, and included different motivations existing in parallel (for example, Butler, 1990; Hanson and McCullagh, 1995; Jensen and Aamodt, 2002; D'Aprix et al. 2004; Stevens et al. 2010; Mizrahi and Dodd, 2013; Paat, 2016). A recurrent factor in the study was the significance of personal or family experiences, which some participants (for example Jane, Y1; Sarah, Y2; Teresa, Y3) said had not merely disposed but equipped them to work with people in difficulty. Indeed, just one participant (Katrina, Y3) spoke about her awareness of the potential dangers of assuming that another person would respond to something as she would herself. Similarly, Wilson and McCrystal (2007, p.43), while citing the 'wounded healer' concept of experience as potentially harmful to service users, found that their own participants generally viewed it as an asset. Participants also expressed their drive to provide as social workers the sort of help they themselves or people they cared about had lacked at a critical time, conveying a desire for redress (for example, Francesca, Y1; Sarah, Y2; Teresa, Y3). There are echoes here of Ashford and Timms (1990, p.10) who found social workers 'making good' in two ways: both repairing damaged lives and relationships and offering reparation. This throws into question Woodward and McKay's (2012) contention that participants who wrote about good assessments when asked questions about values did not know what values were. If a dimension of ethics in social work is

making order out of disarray, then writing a coherent assessment may be construed an ethical task. This perhaps illuminates another of Ashford and Timms' (1990) findings, that for some participants, a dimension of ethical practice was producing good quality reports. However, as raised by Barbara's example above, a focus on paperwork may also be rationalised in a redefinition of what is and is not ethically problematic. What may be relevant is why report writing is a focus of activity, and to what end: to make sense of complexity and support intervention in service users' interests, or simply to meet organisational targets. If the latter alone, the former may be compromised.

My study also suggests that assuming an inevitable opposition between individualistic and structural ethical drivers may be unhelpful. While none of my participants blamed people facing oppression for their plight, as Dedotsi, Young and Broadhurst (2016) had found in Greece, equally none mentioned social justice as an end in itself. Despite this, when their accounts of experiences that had formed their career ambitions were probed for details, they invariably contained elements of both individualistic and societal perspectives. For example, Amy (Y1) shared her personal experience of social exclusion as a young parent; Pauline (Y2) talked about a woman she cared about feeling stigmatised because of her disability; Chloe (Y3) described a relative's harmful institutionalisation. For black participants, a common thread was witnessing or experiencing racism. Overall, structural issues were not so much ignored as exemplified in Individuals' experiences, with participants speaking in terms of wanting to help people like themselves or those close to them. This supports findings in the literature that both students and qualified practitioners

tended to express social justice in individualised terms (for example O'Brien, 2010; Bradley *et al.* 2012). Duschinsky and Kirk (2014) suggested that prevalent welfare cultures might mean not that students did not have values reflective of a structural perspective, but rather that they expressed them in ways they deemed acceptable. However, Fenton (2014) noted the hazards for the profession if limited constructions of social justice go unchallenged in class. For educators, an inference may be that to ignore the structural elements implicit in students' personal examples and experience may either under or over estimate their understanding and commitment to social work's social justice concerns. Either way, failing to make use of these powerful experiences as learning points may be a missed opportunity.

9.3.2 Closeness and separation

Turning now to what participants had to say about orientations of closeness and separation between themselves and service users, we see these being conveyed in the study as representing two broad ethical orientations. In considering closeness, a distinction must be drawn between a connection that generates a drive to act, the focus here, and a potentially counter-productive emotional response. Examples in each of the year groups showed participants recognising that the latter must be managed, for the sake of not only service users' but also their own wellbeing (for example Jane in Y1, Sarah in Y2 and Annie in Y3). This echoes Weinberg (2014) who concluded that her qualified participants simultaneously employed discourses of care for the self and for the other, and highlighted the ethical imperative of self-care

in the interests of resilience. This is an encouraging result given messages from the literature about the importance of resilience for individuals and the profession (for example, McAuliffe, 2005; O'Donnell *et al.* 2008; Mänttäri-van der Kuip 2016). However, participants spoke too about physical and emotional closeness to service users in positive terms, as engendering a drive to intervene. Conversely, the orientation of separation emphasised respect for service users as individuals, in work with whom the principle ethical imperative was empowerment. Striking here is the relative weighting these perspectives carried across the three analyses. Connection dominated in Y1 and separation in Y3, with the two positions receiving a more or less equal amount of attention in Y2.

Talking about closeness leading to action, participants shared detailed experiences of contact with service users in terms which suggested that not only were these instances emotionally affecting, but that the proximity itself galvanised a desire to intervene. These included examples of a mother at risk of losing her child (Jane, Y1), a young man too proud to use a food bank (Pauline, Y2) and an older woman who was hungry and alone (Mary, Y3). Participants spoke about their impulses in these situations in physical and active terms: they wanted to spend time, shop, nourish. They also conveyed the persistent mental images they carried of those they had encountered, for example the mother sitting in a cold house having had her children removed (Linda, Y2) and the woman whose uncut toenails dug painfully into her feet (Katrina, Y3). Overall, there was a sense of ethical responses arising out of direct contact, and enduring in memory. Conversely, when talking about ethics from a perspective of separation, participants articulated instead a more detached regard,

which placed in the foreground service users' independence and autonomy. This orientation towards service users was emphasised with progressively greater complexity across the analyses. In Y1, participants' primary focus was simply on people as unique individuals with the right not to be judged. This principle remained important across the three samples, with participants noting their initially judgmental responses – for example to teenage parenthood (Francesca, Y1), termination of pregnancy (Mavis, Y2), parents who have harmed their child (Barbara, Y3) – as ethically problematic. The Y2 group elaborated on this, talking about the importance of people's rights to make their own decisions even if they appeared unwise. For the Y3 participants, the concept was developed and applied further still, with attention paid to the specific actions participants themselves had taken in applying the principle in their practice. They illustrated this in detailed examples of situations where they had consciously set aside their own views, even, on occasion, where these involved service users (all adults, and with capacity) taking a risk. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, care is needed not to draw ill-founded conclusions about ethical development from the results of the study. This is not only because of its design but also because the literature highlights that different ethical concerns may characterise specific contexts, for example health (Kadushin and Egan, 2001; Walsh *et al.* 2003) and criminal justice (Fenton, 2015). This means that the Y2 participants each having voluntary sector placement experience to draw upon, while the Y3 placements were located in statutory teams, may itself have led to different ways of relating to service users. Nonetheless, Y3 participants, while presenting examples of connection in terms just as vivid as the students in Y1 and Y2, appeared clearly more inclined overall towards separation from service users than those in

earlier stages of the course. The orientation of distance prominent in Y3 does not preclude noticing individuals' characteristics and needs. However, it is now from a perspective less shaped by an emotional reaction. In addition, it was noteworthy that for my Y2 participants, connection with service users ran alongside disquiet about the ethical constraints of the professional social work role. If this reflects a wider picture, separation may not only represent respect but also a solution to ethical discomfort, as students' altruistic ambitions are challenged by regulation and workloads in the final placement, with its statutory emphasis.

There is little about direct experience of ethical orientations towards service users in the literature, where the majority of studies investigating ethics in practice did so by asking questions about attitudes or the decision-making process. Some studies concurred with my finding that practice encounters generated students' ethical responses (Williams and Reeves, 2004; Moorhead, Boetto and Bell, 2014; Levy and Edmiston, 2015; Papouli, 2016). However, they did not address different ethical orientations at different stages of education. Where a shift was reported it was generally towards a greater emphasis on individual empowerment (Saxon, Jacinto and Dziegielewski, 2006; Hughes, 2011; Nathanson, Giffords and Calderon, 2011), which my study's results would seem to support. Amongst studies with qualified participants, Sung and Dunkle (2009) investigated respect, but their methodology precluded scrutiny of individual understanding. Holland and Kilpatrick, (1991, p.141) obtaining richer insight into experience, posited the dimension 'Autonomy and Mutuality' which constituted an ethical continuum between non-intervention and nurture. This was not conceptualised in terms of development, but as an axis along

which individual practitioners are situated. My study makes a contribution here by illuminating the different types of attention participants at different stages of the course paid to service users, with Y3 students standing back in order to see more clearly.

9.3.3 Theorising ways of helping: responding and caring

Just as virtue ethics offers a useful theoretical perspective on the sense participants made of their professional identity, other ethical theory is relevant when considering their responses to others. First, the presence of another person creating a moral drive, rather than being something to which moral rules are rationally applied, accords with Levinas' ethic of responsibility, one of the relationship-based approaches to ethics noted in Chapter Two. Superficially, it may appear unremarkable to assert that witnessing another person's need leads to a desire to assist. For Levinas (1989, p.76), conversely, this is of profound significance: the response to the face of another person is 'first philosophy' – that is, ethics comes before knowledge. Levinas' ideas are not mentioned in the empirical studies included in the literature review, and so a contribution of my study is to offer empirically based support for proximity evoking a primary ethical response. The principle of ethics' embeddedness in relationships is further and more practically elaborated in the ethic of care. Developing Gilligan (1982)'s arguments about gendered ethical priorities, care ethicists contend that giving and receiving care are essential for human beings of any gender, and reflected in personal life, professional

practice and policy development (see Chapter Two). In the literature review, D'Cruz *et al.* (2002) found Gilligan's assertions that women prioritise care over justice, and men vice versa, not upheld amongst social work student participants. My study is unable to offer any insights here, given its wholly female sample. However it echoes Juujärvi (2006) who found that Finnish social work students' care reasoning may develop over time. Thus, just as participants' concerns with character suggested they were intrinsically virtue ethicists, their accounts of responses and behaviours towards service users may be construed as an ethic of care in action. Investigating care in practice with older people, Brannelly (2006) identified four dimensions: caring about, taking care of, caregiving, and care receiving. Concerns reflecting all four of these are discernible in the Y3 examples but not consistently so in Y2 and less still in Y1. Furthermore, an ethic of care also incorporates both the importance of practitioners suspending their own preoccupations and of care including an element of 'repair', other features of ethical understanding that arose from the study. In addition, both Brannelly (2006) and Ottosdottir and Evans (2014) found that care – and the inclusion it facilitates for service users - might be restricted by administrative limitations and cultures. This is salient in the light of the narrowing for some students of the range of ethics noted above, and raises again the importance of conscious ethical agency as a counter to other priorities and constraints.

9.4 Relating to organisations

While less extensive than ethical meanings derived from their relationships with social work and with service users, the significance of how participants related to organisations ran through the data. In this section of the discussion I address in turn the ways in which this differed with regard to first, participants' stage of their course, and second, their age.

9.4.1 Developing an ethical stance

The ethical meanings for participants of the impact of organisations on social work practice were increasingly prevalent in successive year groups. The Y1 participants' year of study had involved little contact with social work or social care agencies beyond brief shadowing or child observation exercises. This group had little to say about organisations, although both Balikis and Amy conveyed some ethical discomfort at the power organisational policy and remit might have over service users' lives. In Y2, participants who had completed 70-day placements in voluntary settings presented a different picture, of policy precluding adequate engagement with service users (Mavis and Pauline) and of local authorities as uncaring (Linda and Sarah). In Y3, where participants had been placed for 100 days in statutory teams, the concerns were strikingly the most pronounced. Interviews abounded with

examples of the impact on ethical practice of organisational requirements and constraints, even if – as we saw above – on occasion these were then reframed in other than ethical terms. This is an important result. In the literature, while some studies identified students' discomfort with practice realities (for example Dodd, 2007; Urboniene and Leliūgiene, 2007), it was predominantly qualified practitioners who voiced concerns. For qualified social workers, and internationally, a recurrent perception was of social work agencies and the welfare regimes they reflected as unresponsive and at odds with ethical practice (for example, Carpenter and Platt, 1997; Kjørstad, 2005; Papadaki and Papadaki, 2008; Gallina, 2010; Manttari-van der Kuip, 2014). Studies found practitioners' responding to these organisational ethical curbs in different ways. Some noted apparently easy compliance with bureaucratic demands (for example Kugelman, 1992; Papadaki and Papadaki, 2008), while others reported a commitment to prioritise service users (for example Linzer, Sweifach and Heft-LaPorte, 2008; Stanford, 2011; McKinnon, 2013). Some authors draw on Lipsky's concept of social workers as 'street-level bureaucrats', exercising discretion in service users' interests as a way to resolve their disquiet with organisational values (Lipsky, 1980, cited in Kjørstad, 2005; Papadaki and Papadaki, 2008; Mänttäri-van der Kuip, 2014). However, as Fine and Teram (2013) point out, a disadvantage of this approach is that organisational failings are not openly debated with those who may have the power to change them. In my study, we see Y3 participants, not yet qualified, similarly finding ways, consistent with their ethical position, to manage official expectations. Their responses to the ethical curtailment they encountered fell into two broad positions, leading to the development of themes that differentiated two types of response. The key difference here was not with regard to

perception: all the Y3 participants expressed disquiet at the impact of organisational factors on ethical practice. Rather, it was about what they did, with limitations either tolerated on the one hand or seen as challenges to be overcome on the other, and by stealth if necessary. The study suggests that in England, social work students may both be experiencing organisational ethical constraints, and also finding the means to employ their ethical agency in response, in ways that more closely mirror qualified practitioners' responses in the literature. This could be variously construed, either as courageous and committed practice or a worrying first step towards dangerous unaccountability. From either perspective, it appears that potential may be instilled at the stage of being a student for the lonely experience of ethics in practice noted in the literature (Holland and Kilpatrick, 1991; Papadaki and Papadaki, 2008). Equally, if students are to be equipped to handle practice realities adequately, it behoves educators to support the development of students' practice such that its ethical content is recognised and ethical choices made explicitly.

9.4.2 The significance of age

My study also makes a contribution regarding students' response to organisations and their age. Across the three samples, it was the older participants – the eight aged over 35 – who tended to express with the greatest clarity the conflict between their values and organisational practice. Here, the study concurs with Fenton (2014), who found, in her study with qualified criminal justice practitioners in Scotland, that

younger workers were more likely than their older and more experienced colleagues to accept uncritically neoliberal assumptions. However, the picture is not straightforward. First, age must be considered alongside participants' stage of their course. As discussed in section 9.4.1 above, the Y2 participants articulated not only concerns about the deleterious impact on service users of administrative systems, but also the greatest personal distress. This echoes Ngai and Cheung (2009), who found that for their participants - social work students in Hong Kong with an average age of 20 – emotional fatigue was more prevalent in the second year of study than the first or third. Similarly, Osteen (2011) noted a stage in student values' development in which initial ideals were disrupted by the realities of practice, before being resolved by a more informed and pragmatic commitment to the profession. None of my Y3 participants spoke retrospectively about experiences of particular ethical distress in their second year of study. However, the flavour of the Y2 interviews raises questions about whether a period of questioning and doubt is a necessary stage of professional ethical identity formation, perhaps separate to any effects of the dominant ideology in which students grew up. Second, while my younger participants were less prone to voice ethical discomfort, the three students who represented orientations of both compliance and resistance towards organisational ethical constraints were also the three youngest in the study. This might suggest that the very plasticity that might make younger students more accepting of prevailing ideologies than their older peers also means that they are on the cusp in terms of their responses to what they find around them. It also casts doubt on whether acceptance of the current ideological context for practice as the norm necessarily precludes a readiness to embrace the opportunities for resistance

available to the 'street level' bureaucrat, noted above. However, none of my participants made links between the administrative contexts for practice in which they found themselves and ideological or political approaches to welfare, or spoke about wanting to change these at a societal level. Participants' individualistic approaches to service users noted in my results chapters, emphasising personal plight rather than systemic inequalities, are echoed in their responses to organisations. Resistance, where it occurs, is a matter of individual agency, not collaboration to bring about structural change.

9.5 Ethical domains for social work education

The chapter has discussed both new insights offered by the study into the meaning of ethics and also instances where the literature has in turn illuminated what the participants in my study had to say. My results portrayed an intricate constellation of personal and professional values and drivers, situated in and reflective of local circumstances. This is in itself a useful result, making a contribution to knowledge about the lived experience of ethics in English social work education today, and so to the evidence-base for social work education. Furthermore, the three domains of participants' understandings of ethics conceptualised in this chapter present opportunities for educators to engage with students in ways that value learners' own experience and starting points, consistent with adult learning principles (see Chapter One). The account of the study's results (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight) noted that the group themes developed from the analysis inevitably overlapped.

This is also true of the domains. However, each suggests a particular area of student development to which educators may wish to give attention. This is not to imply that ethics as understood by students, not yet qualified, should displace the emphasis on regulatory frameworks or the principles of human rights and social justice which underpin social work, and social work education, internationally (IFSW, 2012; IFSW and IASSW, 2004). However, social work practitioners must recognise and meet the ethical issues inherent in their role if they are to uphold the profession's commitment to some of the most disadvantaged people in society. Qualifying education offers opportunities to equip them to do this - and in educating adults, attention to students' own experience and priorities is important in order to engage them effectively (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 2012). Thus the insights the study offers into students' own understandings contribute to the pedagogical evidence base informing the development of students into the social workers of the future.

The most prevalent meanings participants ascribed to ethics in the study as a whole touched on their evolving relationship with social work, reflected in their personal and emerging professional selves and attendant ethical concerns. This domain may be characterised as the **ethics of identity**. Inferences from this must be measured. Identity is not only commonly highlighted in IPA studies (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) but also inherent to qualifying social work education, given its aim of equipping graduates to register under the protected title of social worker (see Chapter One). Moreover, how often something is mentioned does not necessarily indicate its importance (see Chapter Five). Nonetheless, if ethics is the 'conscious reflection on moral beliefs' (Hinman, 2013, p.5, and see Chapter One) then the

preponderant meaning of ethics emerging from the study is reflection on the morality expected of a social worker. Accordingly, just as concerns with character are embedded in social work educational and regulatory frameworks (see Chapter Two) so were they important for students themselves. For educators, the challenge is to harness this focus to facilitate scrutiny, debate and understanding of ethics and its scope in social work practice, and so equip students to thrive in challenging contexts. Overall, the ethical priority arising in this domain is the **cultivation of character**, for which I have suggested that a virtue approach might offer a theoretical starting point.

The study has also illuminated participants' understandings of ethics in their interactions with and on behalf of service users: **the ethics of relationship**. The significance of direct encounters with other people predated participants' starting their course, as most gave examples of their values being shaped or clarified by personal contact. An ethical disposition of altruism thus arose with specific other people in mind, and similarly, structural issues were voiced in terms of individual others. Conveyed too is a perception of ethics as essentially creative: wanting to make good for service users comes out of making sense, although with the sense made perhaps coloured by personal experience. Ethical orientations towards service users are represented by shifting positions of closeness and separation across the three groups, chiming with ethical theory that emphasises ethics as not merely applied to, but situated and generated in, relationships. For educators, the task presented in this domain is to support students to develop skills in recognising and meeting the ethical imperatives inherent in interactions with service users, and so

make ethical sense of **ways of caring**. Consistent with an ethic of care approach, this includes care for the self, in the interests of resilience.

Finally, the study found participants making sense of ethics in the context of the organisations in which they undertook their practice learning, or with which they had contact in the course of their placements or preparation for practice. This domain was the least prominent concern in the study as a whole but especially significant for final year participants, who articulated different patterns of responses. This domain can therefore be termed the **ethics of agency**, as the key factor that distinguished participants' different orientations within it was how they acted. These orientations fell into two broad positions, of compliance or resistance. In this regard, the study found participants making sense of ethics in ways that in the literature were more typical of qualified practitioners. This may not be concerning if it simply shows students demonstrating a sound grasp of ethics as they approach qualification. However, together with some participants' tendency to respond to ethical discomfort with a narrowing ethical gaze, it raises a number of questions for educators. These include the impact on students of placements in statutory settings, the balance between providing sufficient developmental opportunities while recognising learner status, and the implications of both for service users. It makes all the more important ethics education that promotes not only theoretical understanding but also sensitivity to the ethical issues inherent in social work practice (see Chapter One). The challenge in this domain, therefore, is to make students' specifically ethical agency within organisations explicit for them, bringing to the foreground their capacity for value based **choice and critique**. This is not to

argue that educators should encourage students to subvert administrative requirements that reflect statute and policy. Rather, these should not be accepted uncritically but considered from the perspective not only of an employee, but of a social worker.

This articulation of the study's results in the three domains highlights how they may be translated into educational input. For example, the domain of identity provides opportunities both to consider personal motivations and ethical starting points but also to employ a virtue lens to explore and critique the values required of a social worker, including social justice. Similarly, care can be addressed increasingly critically across a course of study, incorporating the ethic of care's structural and political elements (Held, 2006). Thus the domains present a representation of the phenomenon of ethics, as it emerged from the study, which offers an evidence-based approach to facilitate the development of the ethically skilled practitioners that the profession, and service users, need. These may be summarised graphically, showing the domains as distinct but interconnected:

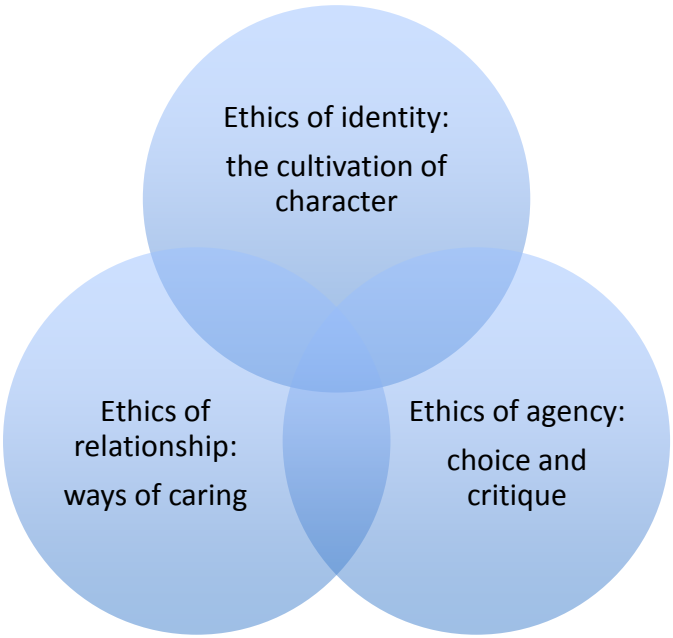

Figure: Domains of social work ethics

This representation of three domains of ethics, with accompanying educational priorities for each, completes the discussion of the study's results. The next chapter, the overall conclusion to the thesis, will return to the objectives of the research and how far they have been met. It then reiterates the principal findings of the study and makes recommendations for pedagogical policy, practice, and further research.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion and recommendations

In this final chapter of the thesis I first address the strengths and limitations of the study, including what I might have done differently. I then revisit my research question and show how I have met its aim and objectives. Finally, I summarise the study's contributions and conclude with recommendations for educational policy, practice and research.

10.1 The strengths and limitations of the study

The strengths of the study lie in its close attention to students' experience of ethics in the course of their social work education in England, which Chapter Four showed was a gap in the literature. In qualitative research the credibility of the findings depend on transparency and rigour, and the level of detail of the analysis. It is important that having developed a methodology suited to meet the demands of a particular research question, the researcher ensures that the research process permits the strengths of the chosen approach to be realised. In Chapter Five, I showed how my study meets IPA quality standards. This enables the reader to assess whether plausible inferences are possible that are relevant beyond the light the study sheds on a small number of social work students' understandings of ethics in a particular place and time.

The study's limitations are intrinsic to its methodology and design (see Chapter Five). In common with other qualitative research methodologies, IPA does not work with samples large enough to generate statistically significant findings. This meant that I did not intend to seek generalisability beyond the students I interviewed, and do not claim it now. My results were drawn from data collected from 16 female undergraduate participants in summer 2014. The students were enrolled on a course that represented one route to social work qualification amongst others, based at one university, with a widening participation agenda, in the south east of England. Had other participants come forward, or had I sought them from other courses or higher educational institutions, or at another time, the data I collected, and the analysis that followed, would have been different to those that provided the basis for this thesis. In addition, the direction of the research was shaped by decisions I made myself throughout the process. This was all the more so given that I was working as a lone and inexperienced researcher, albeit with the support of guidance and discussion in supervision. These decisions included the interview questions I devised, the lines of inquiry that I pursued with participants, and the sense I made of the interview transcripts and recordings at the stage of analysis. While transparency, reflexivity and other quality measures were intended to mitigate the constraints imposed by my personal preconceptions and approach, my own starting point and responses have inevitably coloured the results of my study.

Reflecting on the research as a whole, and considering with hindsight what I might have done differently, I am left with further questions I would like to have asked my participants to clarify their meaning. Despite my close attention in the interviews,

there were gaps in my understanding of what the participants had to say to me that were only apparent to me at the analysis stage, for example what a participant may have intended by choosing a particular metaphor. Equally, given my definition in the study of ethics as involving reflection on moral beliefs (see Chapter 1), then each of my interviews was, in itself, an ethical exchange. Exploring explicitly with participants, perhaps as a final question, what their experience of the interview had been like, was a missed opportunity.

10.2 Revisiting the research question, aims and objectives

The research question asked how students on a qualifying social work programme made sense of ethics and values, in the context of their professional development. The study's qualitative, phenomenological design, facilitating the elucidation of personal sense-making (see Chapter Five), reflected its intention of investigating the meaning for students of their lived experience of ethics and the significance of this for social work education. I shall outline how it has done this with reference to each of its five objectives in turn. This summary overview, bringing together the results and discussion (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight) shows how the study meets its aim.

Objective 1: to investigate students' understanding of the values and ethics which inform their motivations to become a social worker

Participants spoke about the ethics that informed their wanting to become social workers as arising from their characters and backgrounds, reflecting the sort of

people they were. They perceived certain life experiences, both positive and negative, as formative, and some wanted to offer others the support that they themselves, or people they cared about, had been denied at important times in their lives. Together, the examples participants gave conveyed a sense of ethics as reparative or transformative, leading them to want to make good out of bad. Role models were significant, and included family members as well as social workers met personally or professionally. While usually recounted as exemplars, some of these provided instead examples of how not to be, and like unhappy experiences spurred motivations to make good. Across the three samples, participants expressed their motivations in terms of wanting to make differences in the lives of individuals or families. They did not talk about tackling structural disadvantage at a societal level as a motivation in itself. However implicit in examples of significant personal or professional experiences was an awareness of the impact on individuals of society's responses to disability, poverty, old age and ethnicity.

Objective 2: to investigate how students make sense of the relationship between social work values and ethics and their personal ethical principles

With regard to this objective, different emphases were evident across the three samples. While emphasising the congruence between their own and social work values, Y1 participants intimated that although the latter were the foundations for practice some flexibility was possible. For these students, learning how to manage this interface was a challenge that lay ahead. The Y2 group expressed greater dissonance, suggesting that the very motivations that had led them towards social work were compromised by the realities of practice. Experiences of other

professionals – including qualified social workers – appearing to fall short in their care for service users troubled them, and raised questions for them about others' ethical commitment. The final year participants presented a range of perspectives. One was that similarity between personal and professional ethics was essential. Others laid greater emphasis on differences being recognised and managed, whether in the interests of fairness to service users or practitioners' wellbeing. There was some acknowledgement of the role of reflection and supervision in managing this process, although a sense too that as students, participants felt pressure to suppress expression of the 'wrong' views. For some, social work values with regard to sexuality were in direct conflict with the Christian values with which they had grown up, and they managed this in various ways.

Objective 3: to investigate what values and ethics mean to social work students in the course of their practice learning experiences

All my Y2 and Y3 participants were able to give examples of ethically significant events and experiences that arose on their placements. This was most marked for the Y3 group, who had all been placed in statutory agencies, with some participants raising situations in their interviews as potentially ethically troubling but then reframing them as having an administrative solution. The common thread across these examples was organisational constraints on resources being first recognised as an ethical issue but then redefined in terms of the need for parity between service users or the maintenance of professional boundaries. However, alongside instances of this apparently narrowing ethical gaze, there were others of overt or indirect challenge to expected practice, pursued individually. In all three samples, physical

encounters with service users generated powerful emotional responses and a drive to intervene. Recalling these close interactions was distressing for some participants, who accepted that managing this was an important but at times difficult aspect of their work. Empathic closeness, however, was balanced with a more detached regard for difference and the right to choose. The respective balance between these two orientations differed across the three samples, with detachment the dominant perspective for the Y3 sample.

Objective 4: to investigate how students experience their emerging professional values and ethics

As noted above (*Objective 1*) participants generally understood ethics as fundamental to their chosen profession, both attracting them to it and marking it out favourably from others. A corollary of this was the scope for dissonance or distress when participants could not fulfill their own ethical ideals or encountered other professionals who appeared not to share similar values. Across the study, participants talked about respect, care and fairness, with broad consistency about these as important for social work. Again as mentioned above, participants articulated the significance of these principles in the context of contact with individuals: structural inequalities received little explicit attention. Alongside this broad consistency about ethics as essential to social work, however, participants also conveyed it as complex, noting the ethical challenges they had experienced in their learning to date and that they anticipated lay ahead. Equally, they gave examples of the transformative impact on their personal lives of their developing ethical understandings while on the course. Broadly welcome but at times unsettling, these

generally comprised greater tolerance of others and of difference. As with the respective weight given to closeness and detachment, noted under *Objective 3*, there was a difference of emphasis between year groups. For the first and final year samples, ethics was principally 'about' their ethical character, whereas the second year participants were more concerned with how ethics shaped their responses to service users.

Objective 5: to investigate the implications of the results for social work education within current professional frameworks

Participants conveyed ethics as a fundamental but dynamic, complex and potentially troubling aspect of their professional education. It was concerning that the responses to ethical constraint conveyed by the Year 3 sample in particular implied a potentially narrowing ethical gaze, which in the literature was more commonly the case for qualified practitioners. The study also echoed the literature in that social justice received relatively little attention. However, across the three samples students spoke about ethics with enthusiasm and commitment, and expressed readiness to embrace personal change and continuing challenge. If these results are reflected more widely, they suggest that while ethics needs educators' ample and explicit attention if students are to develop into resilient ethical practitioners, students themselves are ready to engage with this.

10.3 The contribution of the study

Since its nineteenth century origins, modern social work has been imbued with ethical concerns (see Chapter Two). Predating professional frameworks and formal ethical codes, debates about the relative significance of 'case and cause…amelioration of individual suffering and social change' have marked the profession (Reamer, 2013, p.17). More recently, and echoing postmodernism's challenge to faith in overarching rules and explanations, there has been an increased focus on the ethical agency of the social worker herself, including her character and relationships with service users (Banks, 2012). Overall, ethics in social work and in social work education is fundamental but mutable and elusive, both the 'core of the profession' (Bisman, 2004, p.109) but like a 'live, large and very wet fish' in running water, difficult to grasp (Shardlow, 1998). Furthermore, while the profession has achieved some global ethical consistency in principle (IFSW, 2014) ethics in practice is shaped and challenged by both national government policy and local circumstances. In England these circumstances have been mixed for social work in recent years, and entwined with debates about the profession's role, standards and standing. English social work education has been similarly contested, with educators grappling with the implications of government commissioned reports and continuing uncertainties about the social work curriculum and regulation. The literature review (see Chapters Three and Four) went on to show what research had found about what qualified and student social workers made of this complexity in practice. The picture that emerged showed continuing tension between individualised and structural ethical priorities as well as newer ethical challenges posed by issues such as environmental concerns and the use of the Internet. It also highlighted ethical constraints arising from the organisational settings for practice and the relevance of

this for the wellbeing and resilience of both individual social workers and the profession – and ultimately, service users. One key message of the literature review was that the meaning of ethics for qualified and student social workers must be understood in its historical, geographical and practice contexts. Another was that knowledge about the lived experience of ethics of social work students in the UK was scant. The present study has addressed this gap. The discussion of the results (Chapter Nine) indicated where they concurred with or differed from other research, while noting that they provide as a whole an original contribution to knowledge about ethics in social work education in England.

In the previous chapter, I proposed three domains of social work ethics: identity, relationship and agency. These were not devised in order to impose structure at the expense of the range of meanings of ethics that the study produced. Rather, they were intended to conceptualise the results in a way that offered pointers for educators that enabled the study to be of practical utility. Here, I return to the multifarious characteristics of social work ethics as derived from my findings. Not all were applicable to all participants, and some were more significant at a particular stage of the course than at others. However, taken together they show participants making sense of ethics as a multi-faceted and dynamic phenomenon, which is or may be:

- Rarely about theory or professional codes
- Experienced in relation to the self, others and organisations
- About identity

- A fundamental characteristic of social work
- Encapsulated in role models
- Challenging
- Needing active engagement
- Involving both precepts and action
- Compromised by organisational contexts
- Both challenged and aided by boundaries between personal and professional values
- About managing personal and professional values in a range of ways
- Both what draws participants to social work but is then constrained in practice
- More characteristic of social work than other professions
- Shaped by both classroom teaching and placement agencies
- For some participants, a function of ethnicity
- Generally, set apart from religious faith
- For second year participants especially, a source of doubt about social work
- A source of profound and potentially troubling personal reappraisal
- Both constrained and offered opportunities by the student role
- About wanting to make something good out of unhappy personal experiences
- About wanting to help individuals, with structural perspectives implicit rather than overt
- Engendered in situations of physical and emotional closeness

- Dynamic, with shifting orientations of closeness and distance towards service users across the three years of the course
- Dynamic, with both separation from and care for service users articulated with progressively greater complexity
- About resistance or compliance with organisational constraints
- For some participants, about responding to ethical discomfort with a narrowing ethical gaze

Presenting my findings in list form conveys the diversity and range of experience that my participants shared with me. It also avoids reductionism, reflecting phenomenological research's emphasis on fine-grained detail and its commitment to investigating experience 'in all its richness and complexity' (Finlay, 2011, p. 13, and see Chapter Five).

10.4 Recommendations for social work education policy and practice

Three sets of recommendations arise from my study. These are intended in turn primarily for policy-makers, social work educators, and researchers.

10.4.1 Recommendations for policy-makers

These recommendations are of immediate high priority, given the changing landscape of social work education in England and its significance for how tomorrow's social workers are prepared to work with some of society's most vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

- The government to balance its investment in 'fast track' and employer-based routes to social work qualification (Frontline, Step-Up and apprenticeships) with the need for an evidence-base informing the education of ethically-literate practitioners
- Social Work England to ensure that ethics remains embedded and explicit in any developments to the qualifying social work curriculum and that this applies to all routes to qualification
- Social Work England to grasp the opportunity to embed social justice explicitly in the regulatory ethics framework for social workers and social work students
- BASW to work to extend its student membership in order to promote for students the importance of a coherent professional identity for social workers beyond employer organisations

10.4.2 Recommendations for social work educators

Most of these recommendations apply principally to those whose core duties are concerned with qualifying social work education, whether as university based academics or practice educators. They may also be relevant for others who are also involved with the support and development of social work students within organisations, for example social workers and principal social workers working in teams or authorities hosting student placements. They are intended for both short and longer-term consideration. However, given the educational changes underway in England, noted above, attention to ethics in social work education is essential now if the profession is to be taken forward by graduates whose practice reflects its core values.

- Academic and practice educators to cultivate students' recognition and critical exploration of ethical issues and dilemmas
- Attention to be paid to the ethical opportunities and challenges inherent in student status, the latter especially where students are also placement providers' employees
- Educators to make explicit the social justice element of ethical practice, for example by highlighting the structural inequalities that may be evident in language and in individuals' circumstances
- Social work educators to recognise students' role models and motivations as a resource for ethical exploration
- The training and support of practice educators and onsite supervisors to

highlight their role in ethics education of practice learning

- Ethics education to incorporate inter-professional perspectives
- Educators to foreground ethics in working with newly qualified social workers, given their continuing learner status in the Assessed and Supported Year of Employment

10.4.3 Recommendations for further research

A strength of my study, noted earlier in this chapter and outlined in greater detail in Chapter Five, is that its findings are based on detailed analysis and close attention to the meaning of ethics for participants. However, this means that it highlights areas for further research, to extend knowledge about ethics in social work education beyond its small-scale parameters. This includes studies to investigate:

- What ethics means for students in England on 'fast track' and other employment-based routes to social work qualification
- The significance for social work ethics of intersectionality, for example with regard to male students and students from varied ethnic and faith backgrounds
- Other stakeholder perspectives on ethics, for example with lecturer, practice educator, employer and service user participants
- Social work students' ethical development and experience over time, including post-qualification and after leaving the profession

- The significance of ethics for failing or failed students
- The utility of specific ethical theories for social work ethics education

10.5 Conclusion: the dance of social work ethics

Preparing social work students to become ethically literate practitioners is an essential element of effective social work education if the ethical principles of the profession are to survive. The results of the study found the complexity of social work ethics in theory and practice surveyed in the background and literature review (Chapters Two, Three and Four) echoed in participants' lived experience. In addition, its phenomenological approach captured a sense of what ethics was 'like': dynamic and entwined in identity, relationships and organisations. It adds to the knowledge base for qualifying social work education that harnesses students' experience and agency to develop the ethically literate practitioners who will help determine the future of the social work profession.

I began my thesis by quoting Reamer (1998), prolific social work academic, as he looked back at the place of ethics in social work since its origins, and noted the enduring significance for the profession of individual practitioners' ethics and values. It is fitting to end it with words from Francesca, a Y1 participant, whose description of the relationship she looked forward to between herself and social work captures the dynamic flavour of ethics which has permeated this thesis:

It’s that dance isn’t it? And we’re just going to be dancing … making sure that I'm not too far away from the set values and ethics but not imposing my own at the same time. So it’s a kind of push and pull, all at once.

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APPENDIX A

Evidence chart: studies with qualified social worker (QSW) participants

Author/s	Country	Context	Investigates	Research design and where present, qualitative analysis approach	Participants (QSW unless stated)	Contribution	Quality rating
Abbott 1999	US	Limited empirical work investigating social work values	Hypothesis that social work values transcend culture	Survey	N = 128	Broadly shared values of rights and self-determination, but otherwise different emphases and apparent understandings	14**
Anderson and Guyton 2013	US	Different professions' use of social media	Different professions' awareness of ethical implications of social media use	Survey	N = 88 39 QSW 43 psychologists 16 physicians	Psychologists used social media most cautiously and physicians least so.	15**

Ashford and Timms 1990	UK	Lack of clarity in the literature with regard to values	Values, via QSW' beliefs and practice	Interviews and questionnaires	N = 43	Broad similarities in values across agencies, with respect and reparation central.	12*
Boland 2006	US	Challenges posed by new medical technology	Hospital QSW' ethical decision making	Survey	N = 239	Funding issues tended not to recognised as ethical, and responses to these driven by process and rules	15**
Bradley et al 2012	US	Lack of knowledge about clinical QSW' motivations	Relationship between licensed clinical social work and social justice	Survey	N = 245	Clinical QSW driven by social justice as well as more casework-oriented motivations	14**
Brannelly 2006	UK	The ethic of care, in work with people with dementia	Participation for people with dementia facilitated by the application of an ethic of care	Observations and interviews. Ethic of care analysis	N = 15 7 QSW 8 community psychiatric nurses	Ethic of care in practice facilitates inclusion; regard for service users not affected by severity of dementia	17***

Carpenter and Platt 1997	US	Challenges to values of financially constrained mental health services	How QSW in different settings describe their personal and professional values	Survey Some qualitative analysis	N = 127	Similar values across groups, but greater discordance between personal /professional values in state-funded provision	13**
Csikai, Roth and Moore, 2004	US	End-of-life care as an emerging research area	Ethical practice experiences and needs of QSW engaged in end-of-life practice	Interviews Template analysis	N = 12	Participants identified issues around autonomy, honesty, beneficence and social justice; further guidance needed	14**
Csikai and Sales 1998	US	QSW involvement on hospital ethics committees	Views of QSW role on hospital ethics committees	Survey	N = 307 159 QSW 148 ethics committee chairs (physicians)	Both groups of participants favoured more QSW participation in hospital ethics committees	14**
Danis et al 2007	US	Impact of whistleblowing on staff	Fear of retaliation for nurses and QSW raising ethical concerns	Survey	N = 1215 793 QSW 422 nurses	Fear of retaliation not correlated with fear of speaking out	14**
Dennis, Washington and Koenig 2014	US	Ethical dilemmas of end-of-life practice	Hospice QSW' ethical dilemmas and their solutions	Interviews Thematic analysis	N = 14	Value conflicts reported with service users and agencies; ethical discussion and consultation valued	15**

DiFranks 2008	US	The NASW Code of Ethics	Disjuncture between personal behaviours and NASW Code of Ethics	Survey	N = 206	Discrete ethics education and private practice positively correlate with less belief in code; teachers can be ethical role models	15**
Dolgoff and Skolnick 1996	US	Importance of values in social work with groups	How QSW manage ethical dilemmas in group work practice	Questionnaires Content analysis	N = 147	Practice wisdom most commonly cited as ethical resource, professional code never	13**
Doyle, Miller and Mirza 2009	US	Complexity of ethics and importance of managing personal values	Ethical decision-making practice	Survey	N = 493	Where personal/professional values are closer, less discrepancy between what participants would/should do in given situation	14**
Egan and Kadushin 1998	US	Lack of research evidence about growing home health care field	Home health care QSW' practice and ethical concerns	Survey	N = 118	Prevalence of ethical concerns, especially with issues of self-determination and capacity	14**
Fenton 2014	UK	Increased managerialism of Scottish criminal justice field	Hypothesises about factors affecting criminal justice QSW' experience of ethical stress	Survey Some qualitative analysis	N = 100	Younger, less experienced QSW report less ethical stress; author suggests having grown up in Thatcher era relevant	17***

Fenton 2015 Same study as Fenton 2014	UK	Increased managerialism of Scottish criminal justice field	Hypothesises about factors affecting criminal justice QSW' experience of ethical stress	Survey Some qualitative analysis	N = 100	Stress caused by workload, but participants appear to identify with penological perspective	17***
Fine and Teram 2009	Canada	Need for research into ethics, and criticism of ethical codes	QSW' ethical experiences in their practice, in the postmodern context	Interviews and focus groups Grounded theory analysis	N = 71	Participants ethical orientation is broadly towards either principles or virtue	15**
Fine and Teram 2013 Same study as Fine and Teram 2009	Canada	Responses to social injustice in the neoliberal context	QSW' ethical experiences in their practice, in the postmodern context	Interviews and focus groups Grounded theory analysis	N = 71	Participants respond to moral injustice by covert and overt means	15**
Frunză and Sandu 2017	Romania	Need for greater clarity of SW values in Romania	Prevalent ethical values for QSW and their impact	Focus groups and an interview Grounded theory analysis	N = 20	Specific values have specific effects on practice	13**
Gallina 2010	US	Ethical disjuncture caused to QSW by limited resources	QSW' perceptions of situations where professional ethics and agency demands conflict	Survey	N = 376	Participants are caught between professional expectations and market forces	16**

Grady et al 2008 Same study as Danis et al 2007	US	Concept of ethical distress	The relationship between ethics education and practice	Survey	N = 1215 793 QSW 422 nurses	Training linked with ethical confidence, QSW'had more training and were the more confident	14**
Hair 2015	Can	Limited knowledge about role of supervision in facilitating social justice	QSW' needs for social justice to be addressed in supervision	Survey Some qualitatiive analysis	N = 636	Limited use of supervision to provide space for discussions of social justice, needed by participants	15**
Holden 2012	Aus	Contested relationship between faith and social work	QSW' ethical use of spirituality in their practice	Interviews Thematic analysis	N = 6	Participants' spirituality interacts with service users'; participants wary of imposing their values	15**
Holland and Kilpatrick 1991	US	Lack of empirically-based knowledge about ethics in social work practice	Practitioners' understandings of and responses to ethical issues	Interviews Grounded theory analysis	N = 27	Values marked by range of emphases in dimensions of decision-making, interpersonal orientation and authority	17***
Kadushin and Egan 2001	US	Limited knowledge about ethical dilemmas in home health care	Ethical dilemmas as reported by in home health care QSW	Survey	N = 364	Participants caught between drivers of service user self-determination and agency drivers	14**

Kaplan 2006	US	Variety of approaches to moral reasoning education	The relationship between different educational background and moral reasoning	Survey	N = 265	First degrees in liberal arts positively correlated with more sophisticated moral reasoning	16**
Keinemanns and Kanne 2013	Nether-lands	Eclectic and broadening range of ethical theory for social work	Moral issues in work with teenage mothers	Interviews and focus groups	N = 19	Moral issues marked by workers' discomfort, and are highly situated	13**
Kjørstad 2005	Norway	Ethical challenges inherent in workfare policies	Ethical implications for and experiences of QSW where workfare is prevalent	Observations, interviews and documents Discourse analysis	N = 12	Professional decisions shaped by personal ethics; workers constrained by competing loyalties	13**
Kugelman 1992	US	Complexity of professional ethics	The role of ethics in QSW' decision-making	Interviews Inductive analysis	N = 20	Other than ethical rationales may compromise advocacy for service users	13**
Landau 2000a	Israel	Situated nature of ethical decision-making practice	QSW' and managers' ethical decision-making practice in hospitals	Interviews Thematic analysis	N = 32	Different ethical orientations evident in practitioners and managers.	13**

Landau 2000b Same study as Landau 2000a	Israel	Complexity of ethical decision-making for hospital QSW	How hospital QSW contribute to ethical decision- making	Interviews Thematic analysis	N = 32	Participants have a sound awareness of what they have to offer inter-professional ethical decision- making, and the centrality of relationships	13**
Landau and Osmo 2003	Israel	Lack of empirical basis for consensus hierarchical ordering of ethical principles	QSW' ordering of ethical principles in theory and application	Survey	N = 62	No evidence for consensus on hierarchy of principles, beyond supremacy of protection of life	15**
Linzer, Conboy. and Ain 2003	Israel	Lack of knowledge about ethical decision-making in practice	How QSW make ethical decisions and the resources they use	Survey	N = 121	Confidentiality and forewarning are major concerns; tendency to seek support outside the profession	15**
Linzer, Sweifach and Heft-LaPorte 2008	US	Ethical challenges for QSW responding to terrorism	QSW experiences of ethical dilemmas in the aftermath of disasters	Focus groups Grounded theory analysis	N = 102	Participants report ethical dissonance and employ creative and pragmatic means to manage it	15**
Manttari-van der Kuip 2014	Finland	Managerialism and QSW' wellbeing	Link between economic constraints and opportunities to practise ethically	Survey	N = 817	Fewer opportunities for ethically responsible practice correlated with less wellbeing	14**

Manttari-van der Kuip 2016 Same study as Manttari-van der Kuip 2014	Finland	The bioethical concept of moral distress	QSW' experiences of moral distress	Survey	N = 817	Prevalence of participants being unable to practice as they would want; lower rate of moral distress	14**
McAuliffe 2005	Aus	Limited research on professional ethics, and relevance for burnout	Ethical dilemmas in practice	Interviews	N = 30	Net damaging effects on participants of ethical dilemmas including stress and fear	13**
McAuliffe and Sudbery 2005 Same study as McAuliffe 2005	Aus	Gap in literature regarding QSW' psychosocial support systems	QSW' sources of support with ethical dilemmas	Interviews	N = 30	The loneliness associated for participants with ethical conflict, and noteworthy inadequacy of agency support	13**
McKinnon 2013	Aus	Inclusion in Australian ethical code of environmental concerns	QSW' practice and views regarding environmental values	Interviews Grounded theory analysis	N = 20	Environmental values limited in practice by organisational constraints	15**

McLaren 2005	Aus	Ethical issues around forewarning	QSW' practice and ethical understandings regarding forewarning	Interviews Hermeneutic analysis	N = 6	Most participants did not forewarn despite it being an explicit requirement of the professional code	17***
Mishna et al 2012	Canada	New challenges, including ethical implications, of digital communication	QSW' use of digital communication in clinical practice and its ethical implications	Focus group and individual interviews Grounded theory analysis	N = 15	Ethical implications of digital communication for confidentiality and boundaries	13**
Nesmith and Smyth 2015	US	Disproportionate impact of climate change on poorer people	QSW' attitudes towards environmental justice	Survey Some qualitative analysis	N = 373	Climate change relevant to QSW who report feeling powerless; should be addressed in education	16**
O'Brien 2009	ANZ	Social justice as a pillar of social work practice	QSW' understandings and applications of social justice	Questionnaire	N = 191	Social justice is an important value for participants, although more in the individual than structural context	9*
O'Brien 2010 Same study as O'Brien, 2009	ANZ	Social justice is central to social work but perceived as under threat	QSW' understandings and applications of social justice	Questionnaire	N = 191	Social justice is an important value for participants, and its application in casework may include structural considerations	10 *

O'Brien 2011 Same study as O'Brien, 2009	ANZ	QSW' role spanning the excluded and included is shaped by social justice	QSW' understandings and applications of social justice	Questionnaire	N = 191	Participants spoke extensively about principles of equality and fairness, although with different meanings	10*
O'Donnell et al 2008	US	Issues including ethical stress relevant for health care QSW	QSW' experience of ethical stress in health care settings, and impact on career plans	Survey	N = 428	Significance for participants' stress levels and moral action of organisational culture and employer support	14**
Olson, Reid and Threadgold-Goldson 2013	US	Importance of clarity regarding the meaning of social justice	What social justice means to QSW	Focus groups Grounded theory analysis	N = 41	Social justice was defined with various emphases, and its effects noted for service users and practitioners	17***
Osmo and Landau 2006 Same study as Landau and Osmo 2003	Israel	Ethical theory as applied in social work and role of personal values	Whether QSW' ordering of values reflect ethical theory	Survey	N = 62	Participants tended to be deontological in principle, consequentialist in application	15**

Ottosdottir and Evans 2014	UK	Challenges of social work practice with migrants	Caring interactions between forced migrants with disabilities and professionals	Interviews Thematic analysis	N = 45 15 migrants 13 carers 17 professionals	Work with migrants raises complex ethical issues with ethics of care one of many resources drawn upon	16**
Papadaki and Papadaki 2008	Greece	Ethical issues for QSW in the Greek context	QSW' experiences of ethical difficulties in organisational contexts	Written accounts Narrative hermeneutic analysis	N = 27	Participants tend not to challenge organisational constraints on ethical practice directly	17***
Poorvu 2015	US	Ethical challenge of practitioner impairment for ageing QSW	Ethical implications for practice of QSW' serious physical illness	Interviews Narrative case study analysis	N = 16	Serious illness generates ethical dilemmas about respective personal and service user need	14**
Proctor, Morrow-Howell and Lott 1993	US	Ethics inherent in social work's history but little researched in practice	Ethical issues for hospital QSW around discharge planning	Structured interview	N = 16 Participants asked about 395 hospital discharges	Ethical dilemmas often reported, indicating ethical engagement; QSW caught between medical drivers and service user needs	11*
Pullen-Sansfaçon 2011	Canada	Constraints on social work values being put into practice	Differences between practitioners' values in different agency settings	Interviews, focus groups and questionnaires Grounded theory analysis	N = 6	Workers whose agencies foreground service –user self-determination less likely to favour agency values	14**

Rice and McAuliffe 2009	Aus	Relationship between social work and spirituality	Ethical implications of QSW' use of and views about the use of spirituality in practice	Survey	N = 1307	Varying degrees of acceptance of different sorts of spiritually-informed interventions	14**
Riffe 1998	US	US practice context of managed care	Effects and ethical implications of managed care for social work practice	Survey	N = 442	Most participants reported that the financial constraints imposed by managed care led to ethical conflicts	13**
Seiz and Schwab 1992	US	US debates about private practice, further contextualised in values literature	Hypotheses regarding QSW in private practice having different values to those not	Survey	N = 642	Hypotheses upheld, but with demographic nuances regarding gender and ethnicity	14 **
Simmons and Rycraft 2010	US	Ethical complexities of social work practice in the military	Ethical dilemmas and concerns of US military QSW	Survey	N = 24	Clinical judgment tended to be foregrounded over moral reasoning	12*
Stanford 2008	Aus	Orthodoxy in the literature about risk as morally conservative	QSW' ethical judgement in the context of risk	Interviews Narrative analysis	N = 18	For most participants risk is not morally conservative, and an ethic of care for service users dominates	14**

Stanford 2010 Same study as Stanford 2008	Aus	Tendency of risk discourses to present QSW as fearful	QSW' ethical judgement in the context of risk	Interviews Narrative analysis	N = 18	Risk can be a positive agent of change, presenting opportunities for creative practice	14**
Stanford 2011 Same study as Stanford 2008	Aus	Gap between professional ideals and the realities of risk – averse neoliberalism	QSW' ethical judgement in the context of risk	Interviews Narrative analysis	N = 18	QSW who advocate for service users are morally active and find opportunities for challenge	14**
Sung and Dunkle 2009	US	Lack of knowledge about respect in practice with older people	How QSW practice and rate the importance of respectful behaviours	Questionnaire	N = 50	Participants showed respect in a range of ways, shaped in part by culture and organisational constraints	11*
Sweifach , Heft LaPorte and Linzer 2010 Same study as Linzer, Sweifach and Heft-LaPorte 2008	US	Ethical challenges for QSW responding to terrorism	QSW experiences of ethical dilemmas in the aftermath of disasters	Focus groups Grounded theory analysis	N = 102	Confidentiality has different meanings which may reflect how participants understand the social work role	15**

Sweifach, Linzer, and Heft LaPorte 2015 Same study as Linzer, Sweifach and Heft-LaPorte 2008	US	Ethical challenges for QSW responding to terrorism	QSW' experiences of ethical dilemmas in the aftermath of disasters	Focus groups Grounded theory analysis	N = 102	Participants torn between ethical principles of beneficence to service users and fidelity to employers tend to favour the former	15**
Taylor, 2006	US	Enduring tension between value of service users' self-determination and conflicting drivers	Role of value of service users' self-determination in experienced QSW's practice	Survey Some thematic analysis	N = 320	Participants value SU self-determination while accepting it may need to be tempered by control	13**
Ulrich et al 2007 Same study as Danis et al 2007	US	Nurses' and QSW' ethical stress and job satisfaction	Nurses' and QSW' views of the ethical climate of their organisation	Survey	N = 1215 793 QSW 422 nurses	Participants appreciated support with ethical issues but ethical education linked to greater dissatisfaction	12*

Valutis and Rubin 2016	US	Literature of professional socialisation	Conflicts between QSW' personal (including religious) and professional values	Survey	N = 169	Few conflicts, but more for more conservative participants	11*
Valutis, Rubin and Bell 2014 Same study as Valutis and Rubin 2016	US	Literature of professional socialisation	Conflicts between QSW' personal (including religious) and professional values	Survey	N = 169	Personal values are complex and types of conflict varied	11*
Walsh et al 2003	US	Limited empirically-based knowledge about ethics in practice	The variety of ethical dilemmas QSW face related to use of psychotropic medication	Survey	N = 994	Many dilemmas experienced, especially regarding consent and resource issues	14**
Walsh-Bowers, Rossiter and Prilleltensky 1996	Canada	Importance of understanding lived experience of ethical dilemmas	QSW' understanding of and management of ethical dilemmas	Interviews	N = 14	Participants reported ethical tensions between service-user facing and agency priorities	10*
Weinberg 2013	Canada	Debates about professionalism and altruism in	QSW' experiences of ethical limitations and dissonance in their	Interviews and focus groups Discourse	N = 26	The relationship between caring for the self and the service user is changeable	14**

		social work	practice	analysis		and may be understood ideologically	

APPENDIX B

Evidence chart: studies with social work student participants

BSW = Bachelor of Social Work
MSW = Master of Social Work
QSW = Qualified social worker
Students are social work students unless otherwise stated

Author/s	Country	Context	Investigates	Research design and where present, qualitative analysis approach	Participants (QSW unless stated)	Contribution	Quality rating
Bellefeuille and Hemingway 2006	Canada	The ethical challenges of structurally-oriented SW practice	Structurally-oriented students' experience of ethical decision -making	Co-operative inquiry Focus groups Thematic analysis	N = 26 Final year BSW	Experience of ethical decision-making marked by emotions including fear and aided by reflection	13**
Butler 1990	US	US debates about students' ambitions	Students' career motivations	Survey	N = 265 First and second year MSW	Most were attracted to traditional mission of work with poorer people	14**
Calderwood	Canada	Growing	Congruence between	Interviews	N = 7	Immigrant values	16**

et al 2009		number of immigrant students and contested definitions of values	immigrant students' and SW values	Thematic analysis	BSWs, 2 just graduated	emphasis the family more than individuals; participants experience some attendant discomfort	
Campanini and Facchini 2013	Italy	Development of professional SW in Italy	Students' characteristics and values	Survey	N = 1893 First year BSW	SW students lower middle class than other students, and conceptualise SW like voluntary work	15**
Carney and McCarren 2012	US	Reported concerns about non-sexual boundary violations between social workers and service users	Students' understanding and attitudes regarding the ethics of dual relationships	Survey	N = 323 192 novice students 131 advanced students	Advanced students demonstrate more confidence and accuracy in responding to ethical dilemmas	12*
Chappell-Deckert and Canda 2016	US	Mennonite values	Congruence between Mennonite and SW values	Narratology Interviews Thematic analysis	N = 3 Final year BSW	Mennonite and SW values compatible	17***
Christie and Kruk 1998	Ireland	Students' career motivations	Student motivations in UK and Canada	Free-text questionnaires Grounded theory analysis	N = 95 Enrolling BSW and MSW	Motivations are complex and vary within and between groups	12*
Chung 2006	US	Challenges	Issues for Asian American	Group	N = 10	Mixed experience of	12*

		faced by Asian American students	students including with regard to values	discussions and written accounts Content analysis	First and second year MSW	Asian American and SW values compatibility	
Csikai and Rozensky 1997	US	US debates about students' ambitions	Students' career motivations	Survey	N = 145 First year BSW and MSW	Most participants are idealistic and altruistic motivations dominate over others	16**
D'Aprix et al 2004	US	US debates about SW's 'dual mission' and students' aims	Students' motivation for joining MSW courses	Focus groups	N = 23 First year MSW	Student aspirations often at odds with SW values	11*
D'Cruz et al 2002	Aus. and UK	Gendered distinctions in ethical theory	Gender and students' ethical aims	Survey	N = 228 First year	Gendered distinctions largely not represented	15**
Dedotsi, Young and Broadhurst 2016	Greece	Economic crisis in Greece and its implications for social work and social care	Effects of education on students' management of value conflicts, with particular reference to anti-oppressive values	Semi-structured interviews Grounded theory analysis within case study	N = 16 at start of course & 14 at end Also interviewed 10 educators	Dominance of individualistic perspectives on oppression and tendency to blame oppressed people	15**

Dodd 2007	US	Ethical decision making in context of limited resources	Ethical dilemmas on placement	Survey	N = 76 First and second year MSW	Beneficence inhibited by structural factors including organisational policy and finance	14**
Duschinsky and Kirk 2013	UK	Debates about students' motivations	Students' understandings of politics and equality in context of SW	Focus groups Discourse analysis	N = 80 First year BSW	Discourses of helping, becoming professional and experience of adversity	15**
Finn 2002	US	Emergence of etherapy and its implications	Students' attitudes towards online therapy, including ethical issues	Survey	N = 378 MSW	Mixed views regarding ethics of online practice	15**
Han and Chow 2010	US	SW's concerns with both individual and societal issues	Students' and QSW' career motivations and any change over time	Survey	N =1424 First and final year MSW	Placement settings affect career choices and view of SW's mission	14**
Hancock, Waites and Klederas 2012	US	SW's commitment to social justice	Students' willingness to advocate for oppressed SUs	Survey	N = 149 BSW and MSW, all years	Most committed to tackling oppression, but doing this is variously construed	14**
Hanson and McCullagh 1995	US	Concerns that 1980s ideology was changing SW	Students' career motivations over a 10-yr period	Survey	N = 804 BSW, all years	Motivations remained principally altruistic	14**

Hughes 2011	UK	Transformative impact of education in current UK context	Impact of personal change including to values on student wellbeing	Appreciative inquiry	N = 5 Final year BSW	Impact of SW education transformative; largely positive but with some negatives	13**
Jensen and Aamodt 2002	Norway	Decline in application for SW and nursing courses in Norway	SW and nursing students' career motivations	Survey	N = 908 148 SWS	Variety of moral drivers relevant and need to be recognised	14**
Johnson et al 2006	US	US debates about congruence between SW and faith-based values	Respective values of more and less religious students	Survey	N = 58 First and second year MSW	Conservative Christian beliefs negatively correlated with SW values	16**
Juujarvi 2006	Finland	Ethic of care theory	Ethical development of SW and other students	Interviews, quantitative analysis	N = 59 First and final year BSW	SW students showed higher levels of care based reasoning	13**
Kane 2004	US	Challenges presented in the US by managed care	Students' readiness for ethical practice in managed care settings	Survey	N = 116 MSW	Experience not predictive of ethical preparedness	15**

Landau 1999	Israel	Inconsistent picture in research about impact of SW education on values	Relationship between demographic characteristics, professional socialisation and ethical reasoning	Survey	N = 360 First and final year BSW + 212 QSW	Final year students are more service-user oriented; religiosity also positively correlated with a more developed ethical judgment	14**
Lennon-Dearing and Delavega 2015	US	'Anti-gay; legislation in some US states	Students' ethical compliance with regard to lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans people	Survey	N = 235 Students and QSW	Students tended to be more conservative than QSWs	15**
Levy and Edmiston 2015	US	Service learning and values development	Whether service learning develops SW values	Survey	N = 36 BSW first year	Service learning associated with commitment to SW values	13**
Levy, Shlomo and Itzhaky 2014 Same study as Shlomo, Levy and Itzhaky, 2012	Israel	Link between values and professional identity	Factors comprising SW identity	Survey	N = 160 Final year BSW	Supervision instrumental in consolidating professional identity development, including values	15**
Limb and Organista 2003	US	US concerns about SW's move away from serving poorer people	Assumptions in the literature about changes in SW's focus	Survey	N = 7,412 First and second year MSW	Participants drawn to clinical but also other work; black students more committed to SW values	16**

Limb and Organista 2006	US	As Limb and Organista 2003	How students' views on SW's mission change between entry and graduation	Survey	N = 6,987 First and second year MSW	Students tended to be more progressive at end than start of course	16**
Lindsey 2005	US	Utility of study abroad	How study abroad affected SW students' values	Reflective journals Adapted grounded theory analysis	N = 41 29 BSW and MSW 12 BSW	Six themes elucidate positive impact of study abroad for value development	17***
Miller 2013	US	Role of explicit and implicit curricula in professional socialisation	Variables, including adherence to SW values, predicting professional socialisation	Survey	N = 489 BSW, MSW students and QSW	Factors positively correlated to SW values include age and classroom content	15**
Miller and Hayward 2014	US	Growing concern in SW with environmental issues	Students' attitudes and beliefs regarding environmental issues	Survey	N = 205 BSW and MSW	Students' attitudes similar to general population; more likely to take micro than macro action	16**
Mizrahi and Dodd 2013	US	Literature of professional socialisation	Students' attitudes towards SW's goals and social activist activity at start and end of course	Survey	N = 225 First and final year MSW	Consistent pattern at start and end of course	13**
Moorhead, Boetto and Bell 2014	Aus	Growing significance for SW of globalisation	Impact of study abroad on SW students including regarding values	Reflective workshop Thematic analysis	N = 18 14 BSW 2 MSW 2 other majors	Benefits noted to self – awareness and appreciation of social justice	14**

Nathanson, Giffords and Calderon 2011	US	Importance of showing impact of education on ethics	Differences in values at start and end of course, and between universities	Survey	N = 178 First and final year MSW	Differences across time and place identified	11*
Ngai and Cheung 2009	Hong Kong	Cross-disciplinary literature of burnout	Hypotheses regarding relationship between altruism, emotional exhaustion and 'burnout'	Survey	N = 165 BSW, all years	Picture more complex than hypothesised	16**
Osteen 2011	US	Centrality of values in SW and SW education	Students' career motivations and values	Interviews Thematic analysis informed by grounded theory	N = 20 MSW first and second year	Domains of motivation, evaluation and negation integrate personal and professional values	17***
Paat 2016	US	Career choices situated in US context	Influences on SW majors' career choices, including altruism	Interviews Thematic analysis informed by grounded theory	N = 40 Successful BSW applicants	Themes of events, transition, linked lives, values and rational decision-making mark career choice	16**
Papouli 2016	Greece	Practice as key site of ethical learning	Students' ethical development in the course of their final placement	Questionnaire Content analysis	N = 32 Final year BSW	Ethics and values in practice shaped by self, others and service user behaviour	16**

Prior and Quinn 2012	US	Increased interest in relationship between spirituality and social justice	The relationship between connectedness to humanity and engagement in social justice advocacy	Survey	N = 154 BSW and MSW	Positive relationship between connectedness and social justice advocacy	16**
Sanders and Hoffman 2010	US	Debates about relative merits of discrete and infused ethics education	Student reports of different approaches to SW ethics education	Survey	N = 144 MSW	Discrete input with common morality emphasis positively correlated with moral judgement	14**
Saxon, Jacinto and Dziegielewski 2006	US	Ethical decision-making	Students' attitudes towards confidentiality	Survey	N = 80 First and second year BSW First and final year MSW	Those with more experience and education less likely to break confidentiality	13**
Shlomo, Levy and Itzhaky 2012	Israel	Link between values and professional identity	Factors comprising SW identity	Survey	N = 160 Final year BSW	Satisfaction with supervision and personal values contribute to professional identity development	14**
Singletary et al 2006	US	SW's religious heritage	Meanings of vocation for religious students	Interviews Thematic analysis	N = 10 2 BSW 4 MSW 4 PG SW/Divinity	Vocation influenced by influence of others, education and faith	14**

Stevens et al 2010	UK	New SW degree in England and debates about students' motivations	Students' career motivation	Survey Also used focus groups (FGs)	N = 2, 871 (survey) and 168 (focus groups) BSW and MSW, first and final years	Students generally altruistic, but demographic factors relevant too	16**
Urbonienė and Leliūgienė 2007	Lithuania	Contested meaning of values in SW	Barriers impeding students' application of professional values	Questionnaires Content analysis	N = 455 final year BSW 202 from Lithuania 137 from Sweden 116 from Belarus	Barriers are internal and external, and stronger in Belarus and Lithuania than Sweden	11*
Van Soest 1996	US	Importance of students understanding oppression	Impact of learning on oppression	Survey	N = 222 First and final year MSW	Learning about oppression may lead to dissonance and distress	14**
Van Voorhis and Hostetter 2006	US	Limited knowledge about educational input on social justice	Personal empowerment, and commitment to service user empowerment, at start and end of course	Survey	N = 52 MSW, first year	Students retain belief in a just world and gain sense of agency	14**

Warde 2009	US	Need to increase the ethnic diversity of QSWs	Motivations of Hispanic and African-American male students	Phenomeno-logical orientation Focus group Thematic analysis	N = 7 3 final year BSW 4 final year MSW	Motivation shaped by personal history, role models and altruism	17***
Wiles 2013	UK	Implications of [then new] mandatory GSCC registration	Students' understanding of professional registration	Interviews Foucauldian discourse analysis	N = 7 1 second year BSW 6 final year BSW	Professional traits comprise part of professional identity, and include values	16***
Williams and Reeves 2004	US	Values development through service learning	Impact of service-learning on learning generally and values development	Journals, focus groups and course evaluation Thematic analysis	N = 21 First year MSW	Service-learning promotes self-knowledge and values development	17***
Wilson and McCrystal 2007	UK	Northern Irish concerns about SW recruitment and retention	Students' career motivations	Survey	N = 117 First and final year MSW	Altruistic motivations dominate; for some SW role model significant	13**
Wong and Yuen 2013	Hong Kong	Debates regarding nature of SW values	Values held by social work compared to other students	Survey	N = 99 BSW and MSW and 619 other students	SW students lay less emphasis on prestige, more on benevolence	14**

Woodward and McKay 2012	UK	Challenges in articulating SW values	Students' understanding and development with regard to values	Written responses to vignettes Focus groups Content and thematic analysis	N = 22 First year MSW	Values, especially regarding structural disadvantage, are hard to grasp	14**
Yeung et al 2010	Hong Kong	Ethical decision-making as a practice issue	SW and nursing students ethical decision-making	Focus groups Grounded theory analysis	N = 60 30 final year BSW 30 final year nurses	SW students oriented more to service-use self-determination, nurses more towards care	13**

APPENDIX C

Interview guide: all samples

Question 1: Please tell me about what led you to the decision to pursue a career as a social worker.

Prompts/probes

- Influential people?
- Work/personal experience?
- Longstanding/recent ambition?
- If students respond in terms of 'making a difference' or ' helping people, seek clarification, why social work rather than another 'helping' profession?
- If not social work, what?

Question 2: Please tell me about how you acquired your personal ethics and values.

Prompts/probes

- Family?
- Education?
- Faith?
- Particular experiences?
- In summary, key principles?
- Are they still changing?

Question 3: What can you tell me about any difference, or potential difference, between your own value base and what is expected of you as a social work student?

Prompts/probes

- Work with particular service user group?
- If tension identified – how do you /might you manage it? Does it matter?

Question 4 **YEAR 1:** You've had experience this year of setting up & carrying out the child observation task. What part do you think social work ethics and values have played in your approach to how you did this?

Prompts/probes

- Any particular aspect of values/ethics important ?

- Did your sense of your ethics & values change over the course of the child observation task?

Question 4 **YEARS 2 & 3:**
You've had experience this year of going out into the world of practice as a social work student. What part do you think your social work ethics and values have played in your approach to your practice?

Prompts/probes

- Any particular aspect of values/ethics important given agency/SU context?
- Any examples of practice where values/ethics have felt especially significant?
- Have your ethics & values changed over the course of your placement?

Question 5 **YEAR 1:** Please tell me about any decision you had to make in the course of this task where you felt that you had to balance different ethical considerations.

Prompts/probes

- put another way – ethical dilemma or challenge
- prompt for detail, how you dealt/deal with this, thoughts & feelings then & now

Question 5 **YEARS 2 & 3:** Please tell me about a decision you have had to make or been involved in in your placement this year where you felt that you had to balance different ethical considerations.

Prompts/probes

- Prompt for detail, how you dealt/deal with this, thoughts & feelings then & now

Question 6 **YEAR 1:** You've also carried out a shadowing task this year. Can you tell me about any situation you witnessed where you think ethics and values were especially significant?

Prompts/probes

- details
- how close were these to what you think of as social work values
- what might you have done differently?

Question 6 **YEARS 2 & 3:** Please tell me about any situation in your practice learning where what you would have liked to do conflicted with what you were able to do given your role.

Prompts/probes

- How did you manage this?

Question 7: Drawing on your overall experience of the course this year, please describe any occasion when you challenged something you witnessed on the basis of your ethics and values.

Prompts/probes

If an example identified probe for

- detail
- feelings
- any support sought

If no example identified, prompt for

- any example of challenge (then tease out any ethical aspect)
- any occasion when you thought about challenging, or now think you should have done?

Question 8: Please tell me about any differences you are aware of between social work values and ethics and those of other professions.

Prompts/probes

- What other professionals have you experience of?
- Is their value base the same as social work's?
- Any key differences?
- Impact of the differences?
- Examples of situations when differences were apparent?

Question 9: Looking back over your time on the course so far, do you think it has affected your personal ethics and values?

Prompts/probes

- What aspect of the course?
- When/how did you realise your personal values had changed?
- Has this changed how you think of yourself?

- Is this change a continuing process?

If no - any change to your life at all?

Question 10: Finally, is there anything else you would like to add about your learning and understanding of social work ethics and values during your time on the course?

APPENDIX D

Student experience of social work ethics and values: participant information and consent sheets

[Please note, my supervisory arrangements changed after this was written and used]

Participant information

This is an invitation to participate in research I am undertaking as part of doctoral study at the University of Bedfordshire. My supervisors are Dr Sarah Galvani (Institute of Applied Social Research) and Professor Ravi Kohli (Department of Applied Social Studies); the fieldwork has received ethical approval from the University's Institute of Applied Social Research Ethics Committee. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary.

The research

The social work profession places significant emphasis on its value base and there is a substantial literature about social work values and ethics and their centrality to good social work practice. There is less information, however, about how values and ethics are experienced by practitioners and students and this is the area I want to research, by exploring students' own learning and understanding in relation to ethics and values.

The researcher

I am a qualified social worker with nearly twenty years' experience in practice including work with both adults and children and as a practice teacher. I have been working at the UoB Luton campus as a senior lecturer in social work since 2005, am registered with the HCPC and a member of BASW. I enrolled as a PhD student at the UoB in 2012.

Participation

Participation will comprise taking part in a 1:1 interview. I will ask questions about why you want to be a social worker, what you think about social work's value base and your experience of direct work with service users. I anticipate that each interview will take up to an hour, and they will be arranged at a time and place convenient to you, for example at any of the University campuses or at your home. I hope that you will agree to the interviews being recorded for later transcription and analysis, but otherwise notes will be taken.

When the interviews have been completed I will invite participants to a group seminar to hear about early findings and will be happy to provide you with a summary of the thesis after successful submission.

Confidentiality

Participant consent sheets, demographic data, interview recordings and any hard copy transcriptions of interviews or subsequent analysis will be stored securely in a locked drawer and transcriptions anonymised. All computers and data storage devices used for the transcriptions and analysis will be password protected.

All transcriptions and recordings, and any other participant documents, will be destroyed 24 months after successful completion. Extracts from interviews may be included in the thesis but you will not be identified by name, although details such as age and gender may be included if relevant to the findings.

I will ask you not to refer to any service users or colleagues by their real name in the interviews and will not name any individual or placement agency in the interview transcripts or the completed PhD.

The interviews are intended to be exploratory and to enable me to find out about your experiences and understanding: there are no right or wrong answers. Your participation – or your decision not to take part – plays no part in any assessment of you as a student social worker.

Anonymous interview recordings may be transcribed by a professional transcription service used by the University and with high standards of confidentiality and security. Otherwise, what you tell me will be shared anonymously with my supervisors for the purposes of my PhD supervision, but not with colleagues who teach or assess you, or with anyone else, except in circumstances where there is a risk of harm to yourself or others. In these circumstances I will share my concerns with you and encourage you to take part in any disclosure to the appropriate authority unless this would in itself involve harm to you or to others. Should you choose not to take part in such a disclosure, I would have to act in accordance with my position as an ethical researcher and a registered social worker, and information would be shared with the appropriate authority and my supervisor.

Dissemination

Findings may be disseminated both before and after the PhD has been completed, for example in journal articles or presentations. PhD theses may be publically available in the University library or online.

Support for participants

I do not anticipate that the interviews will cause you distress as my questions will ask you to reflect about yourself and your experiences in ways with which you will already be familiar as social work students. However, you will have the right to withdraw from the interviews or from the study at any time up to writing without having to give an explanation, and without any consequences for you. Similarly you may choose not to answer individual questions. In the unlikely event that you need

personal support following an interview this will be available from your personal tutor or in confidence from the University counselling service who you can contact via sid@beds.ac.uk or direct at counselling@beds.ac.uk. Should you prefer to access support independent of the University your personal tutor will be able to advise.

Please let me know if you would like any further information about the study - mobile or email is usually the quickest way to reach me. If you have any concerns about the research process, or would like to make any comments, you can contact the Director of Study, Dr Sarah Galvani, on [email address] in the first instance, or Director of Research Development, Dr Della Freeth at [email address]

I hope that you will be interested in taking part, and thank you for taking the time to read this.

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Student experience of social work ethics and values: consent sheet

Participant

- I have been provided with the Participant's Information Sheet and the opportunity to ask any questions arising from it before the interview

- I agree to participate in the research study as outlined in the Participant's Information Sheet by taking part in an interview

- I understand how to contact the researcher or the research supervisor with any further questions

- I agree/do not agree [please delete as applicable] to interview data being recorded and stored and used in the study as described in the Participant's Information Sheet

- I understand and agree to the arrangements described in the Participant's Information Sheet to maintain confidentiality except in exceptional circumstances

Participant's name _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Researcher

- I confirm that the research will be carried out as described in the Participant Information Sheet (attached)

Researcher's name _____

Researcher's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX E

Examples of annotation in NVivo

26/11/2015: Amy's interview, Year 1 sample

a) early in the interview

What led you to decide to apply for the course?

Um, well I kind of toyed with the idea for a long time, and I've always kind of wanted to help people that are a little bit, you know, more vulnerable than me, um, and when I had, I had my first son when I was 17, so that was kind of my first um, you know, feeling of being a bit socially excluded, so er yeah, it's just, it kind of spurred me on to want to help people that are, you know, kind of socially excluded and yeah.

So that was one of the main things that pushed me, but then obviously because the kids were growing up and stuff, I didn't decide to do it till a bit later on.

#	Annotation
1	Interest in SW longstanding has 'always' wanted to help others Wanting to help those more vulnerable Significance of birth of son - encouraged her Her own experience of SE, wanting to help those similarly affected 'toyed' and 'spurred' - former childish image? - did the 'always' predate being 17? 'First' x2 - sense of new beginnning social exclusion equated with vulnerability? desire to be a SW founed on empathy? - so feeling leads to doing? Ethics of care?

b) later on, talking about an experience of shadowing practice in a contact setting

And how did that feel for you being there?

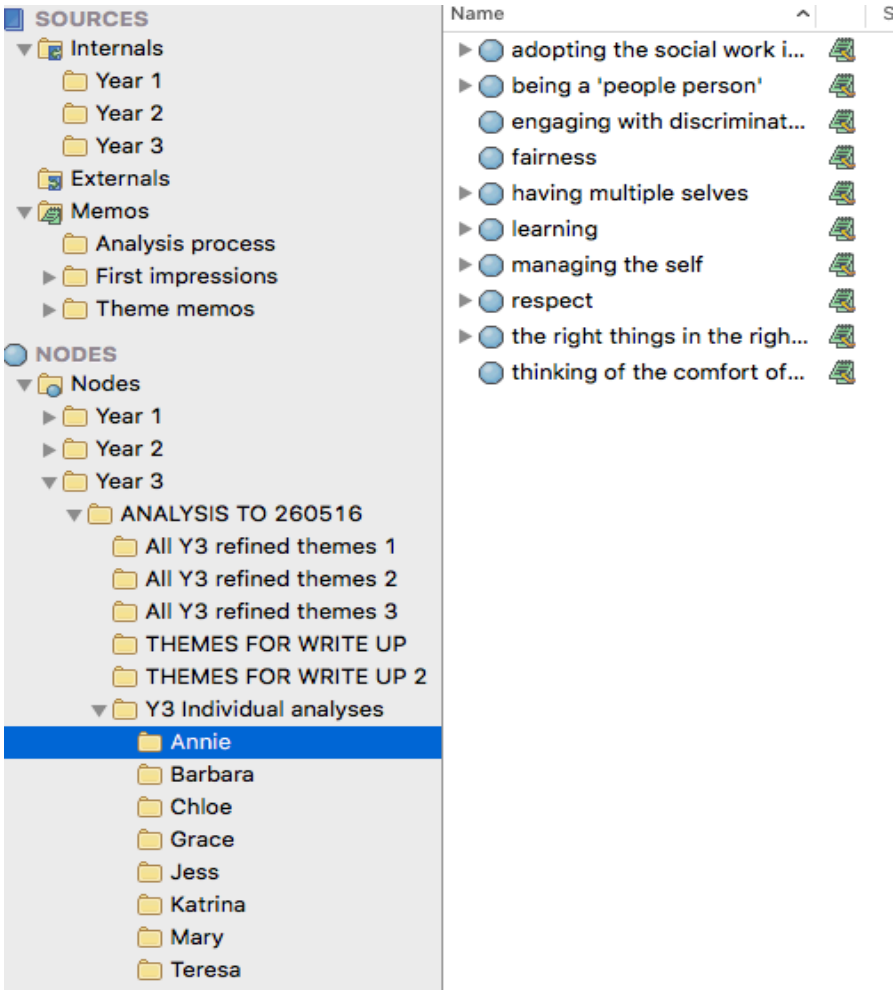
I just felt, like I say, I felt like an, I felt a bit like an imposer, um, like big brother is watching you or something like that, you know. It felt a little bit awkward. I didn't feel like I was helping her, um, do the best in a contact session that she could have done. Yeah.

#	Annotation
36	hesitant, working it out imposer - has used this word or similar before - is there something here re its closeness to imposter? - not quite in the SW role yet & not entirely happy at being aligned with it? discomfort at being 'big brother' - 1984 or TV in her mind? - either way sense of all seeing & potentially 'finding out - so altho' attentiveness part of SW not all attention is benign. ethical drive to help SUs do their best?

APPENDIX F

Example of individual participant's themes in NVivo

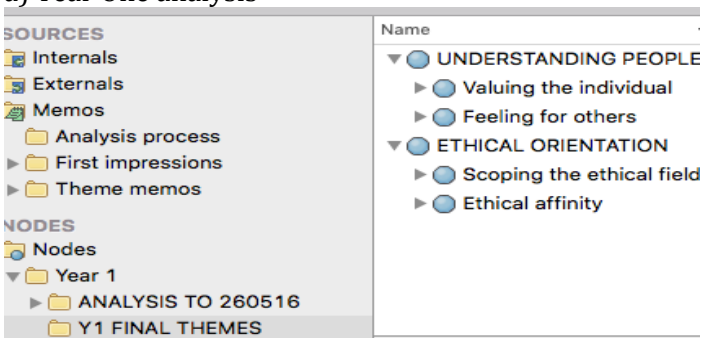
Annie, Year 3 sample



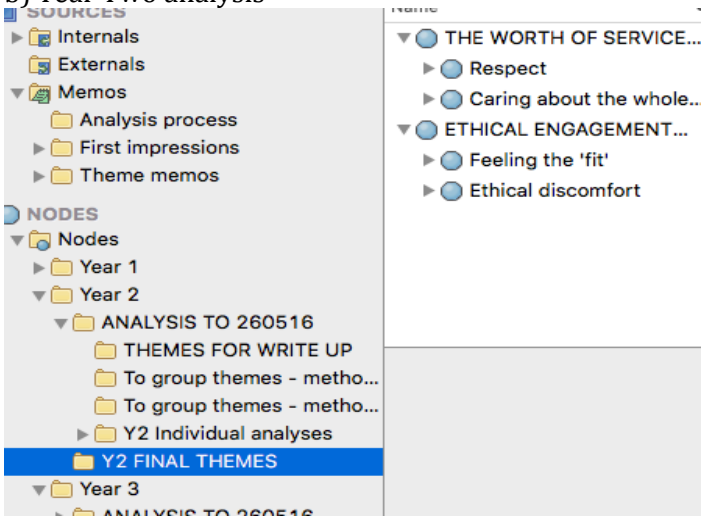
APPENDIX G

Group and SUPER-ORDINATE themes in NVivo

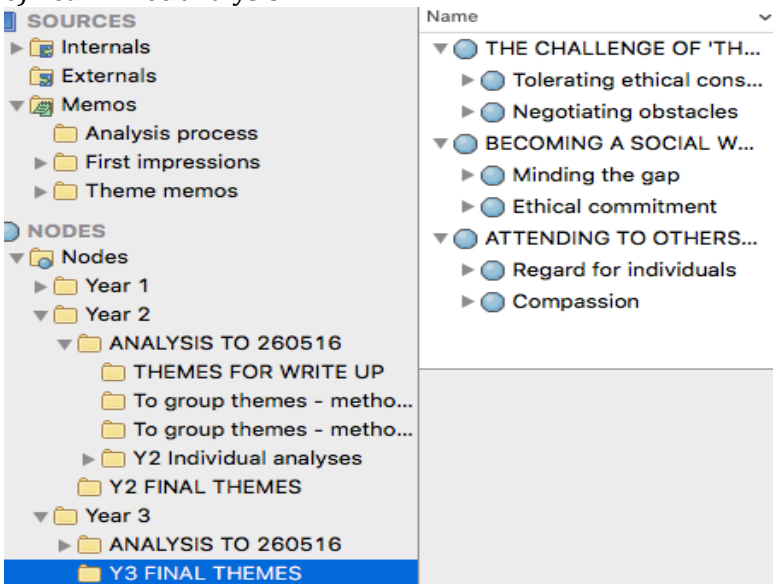
a) Year One analysis



b) Year Two analysis



c) Year Three analysis



APPENDIX H

Copy of ethical approval confirmation

University of Bedfordshire
Institute of Applied Social Research
Dept of Applied Social Studies
Park Square
Luton
LU1 3JU

FAO Sally Cornish

12 March 2014

Dear Sally

Re: IASREC Application
Project Title: The experience of social work ethics of students on a qualifying social work

The Ethics Committee of the Institute of Applied Social Research has considered your application and has decided that the proposed research project should be approved.

Please note that if it becomes necessary to make any substantive change to the research design, the sampling approach or the data collection methods a further application will be required.

If the proposed work involves users or providers of any local authority service (this includes some education, pre-school and care establishments) you will additionally need approval from the relevant Local Authority.

If the project involves users of providers of health services approval will also be required from the relevant NHS Research Ethics Committee.

Proposals relevant to Luton Borough Council's Research Governance Committee will be forwarded by IASREC on your behalf. For other councils this will be the responsibility of the researcher. In all cases **it is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of proof of all necessary authorisations before any fieldwork commences.**

Yours sincerely

Dr Tim Bateman
Chair IASREC

APPENDIX I

Examples of impressions, themes and process memos

a) **Initial impressions: Jane, Year 1**
In notebook had recorded impression of an open, humorous woman. Rather a physical interview – lots of hand gestures, spoke of 'jumping' with rage etc. cried. Had very much warmed to her and the interview felt rich esp. compared to that which immediately followed it. Sense from her of real engagement with the questions and of 'thinking out loud' at times …Found listening back an emotional experience esp. where she cried with distress at the prospect of a young woman losing her baby. Language often rather childlike – people described as 'horrid', young woman needing her 'mummy'. Jane described herself as 'innocent' and there was a sense of her struggling at times to understand how people could be unkind. Seemed quite 'down to earth', but does this impression reflect my own assumptions (given her strong Yorkshire accent) of people from the north of England?

b) **Group themes: Respect: in my mind I'm not judging them', Year 2**
[after examples from other Y2 participants] Sarah speaks about the importance of respect - which she describes as not discriminating against people because of their choices - and her belief in everyone's significance and right to make choices - even if she does not agree with them or if they choose not to engage. One of the examples of poor practice she gives is that of a young girl whose social worker apparently rode roughshod over her wishes and what Sarah found objectionable was less the decision made, more the girl not being informed - so not given due respect. She also describes herself as trusting in people's potential and not giving up hope. This respect for the individual feels Kantian (& perhaps Rogerian?) but there is also a sense of 'not a sparrow falls' although Sarah does not make a connection with her faith. Sarah also extends this respect to professionals, where she talks about their having a reason to appear to fall short, for example busyness, so treating them as rational beings.

c) **Analysis process: Year 3**
Wanting to look again at themes to identify patterns having got v. immersed in the students' individual stories. Realised after supervision this week I 'know' each of them well but need to step back to look at concepts across the dataset. Sense of IPA as involving 'dance' between the idiographic/group perspective – and perhaps being SW and tutor I tend to gravitate towards seeing students as individuals? Put all themes on the wall and looked again. Clusters generated largely as before but with a few changes, better (I think) capturing meaning discernible across cases.